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ADON AIS



*Plays by Dorothy Hewlett :*

THE LOSING SIDE  
ILLUSIONS  
PENNY PLAIN  
THE MAGICIAN  
OZYMANDIAS THE KING





Your sincere friend  
John Keats -

From a drawing by Joseph Severn.

# ADONAI8

*A Life of John Keats*

By

DOROTHY HEWLETT

*Illustrated*



*Publishers  
since 1812*

HURST & BLACKETT, LTD.  
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. . . till the Future dares  
Forget the Past, his fate and fame shall be  
An echo and a light unto eternity.

TO  
N. K.

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## FOREWORD

WE like the Georgians, we are interested in them. Ungratefully, and with gross inaccuracy we are apt to think of our grandfathers, the Victorians, as a dour, bewhiskered crowd, swathed heavily in dusty drapery. These trim Georgians, elegant and cleanshaven, bowling along their fine coach-roads, full of ideas of reform, many of them rebels at heart, seem less like ancestors than elder brothers. Here again our view is superficial and inaccurate, but it is symptomatic.

Of all the voices coming over to us from that congenial age Keats's voice is the most modern. In his marvellous letters he speaks for the most part in an idiom we understand ; his style is easy, unaffected and vigorous.

It has been my aim in this book to set Keats against the Georgian background. I have let him speak in his own words as much as possible. I have approached the man from the angle of his life rather than his work (so far as the two can be separated), though I have out of enthusiasm been betrayed into more commentary on the poems than I originally intended. I have, as a part of my scheme of presenting Keats 'in period,' given more space to the reviews of his books than previous biographers. If these are found not to be of general interest I hope the reader will skip with a clear conscience. The reviews are all concentrated at the end of Chapters VII, XIII and XIX. They are, however, of value to the specialist in assessing the attitude of contemporary critics and readers to the romantic movement.

Now for the agreeable ceremony of thanks. To Mr. Buxton Forman I make my first bow. With sources, with advice and kindly criticism he has removed many briars from my path. Without his help and preliminary encouragement this book would not have *been*. I am indebted also for help, advice and criticism to Dr. Willard B. Pope who has in addition generously put at my disposal unpublished research upon Brown, Haydon, Reynolds and others of Keats's circle. My thanks are due to the officials of the Hampstead Library who have allowed me access to much material in their possession and especially to Mr. Lionel R. McColvin, the Chief Librarian, and to Mr. Fred Edgcumbe, Curator of the Memorial House, the fairy godfather of all good students of Keats. To Dr. Barry Garrad, who has given me much of his valuable time, my debt is a peculiar one and of longer standing. I am proud to call myself his pupil. Mr. Edmund Blunden has in his unfailing kindness read two chapters of my book relating to Leigh Hunt and answered various questions out of his wide knowledge of the period. Professor H. W. Garrod has given me a delightful foretaste of his new edition of the Poems and allowed me to use information. Dr. E. de Sélincourt has also helped me on some points connected with the poems. The Secretary and Librarian at Guy's Hospital have given me access to records and books. Mrs. Stanley Unwin has allowed me to make use of letters by Severn belonging to her and the Director of the Pierpoint Morgan Library has given me permission to quote from letters in their possession. I have endeavoured whenever possible to work direct from sources but I am naturally in some measure indebted to the works of the late Sir Sidney Colvin and Miss Amy Lowell and must thank Mr. E. V. Lucas, Messrs. Macmillan & Co., Ltd., and Jonathan Cape, Ltd., for allowing me to make some quotations from them.

I render also grateful thanks to the following kind people who have given me information upon special points or aspects: the Duke of Argyll; Messrs. G. Allen, Clerk to Christ's Hospital; Leonard Jordan of Newport, Isle of Wight; Dr. T. Wilson Parry; Mr. Francis W. Robinson, Assistant Curator to Cincinnati Art Museum; the Keeper of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery; Signorina Vera Signorelli, Curator of the Keats Shelley Memorial, Rome; Messrs. H. Tapley-Soper, City Librarian, Exeter; Sotheby and Co.; H. W. Turner, Teignmouth; Dr. G. C. Williamson and Mr. H. Saxe Wyndham.

DOROTHY HEWLETT.

*February 18th, 1937.*



# ADONAIS

## CHAPTER I

### *His Birth, Parentage and Early Childhood*

ON THE 31ST OF OCTOBER, 1795, AT THE SWAN AND HOOP Livery Stables, 28 Finsbury Pavement, John Keats was born.

Finsbury Pavement, outside the precincts of the City of London, faced a wide stretch of flat fields, the Moorfields. Within the City the narrow streets were thronged with life both commercial and domestic: the majority of City tradesmen still lived over their shops. But London was beginning to spread outwards and the stables were on the fringe of the growing suburb of Finsbury. Near by were the new and stately Square and Circus that now preserve in the midst of drab streets the last remnant of the living green of Moorfields.

With the bustle of the prosperous stables, the ring of hooves on the cobbled yard, the jingle of harness and the shouts of ostlers, it must have been a cheerful and stimulating environment for a lively baby. The legend goes that he was a seven-months' child but there seem to have been none of the characteristic signs of delicacy about him.

Thomas Keats, the poet's father, head ostler to John Jennings, the proprietor of the Swan and Hoop, married his master's daughter. It is said that in addition to owning the livery stables Keats's grandfather ran a line of coaches. He was certainly a man of substance. At his death in March, 1805, he left a fortune of over thirteen thousand pounds.

We know little of Keats's mother and still less of his father. One account of him suggests that he was a boorish fellow,



unduly elevated by his rise in the world, apt to carouse with jolly companions and that 'he did not possess or display any great accomplishments.' The second account gives him as 'a man of remarkably fine common sense and native respectability,' and with 'a lively energetic countenance.' The first is in the reported words of Richard Abbey, afterwards guardian to the Keats children, and the second that of Charles Cowden Clarke, son of the headmaster of the school at which the boys received their education. Abbey's account of Keats's parentage is, on certain points, of proved inaccuracy.

In 1827, six years after Keats's death, his publisher, John Taylor, wishing to write a memoir of the poet, asked Abbey for particulars of his origins and early years. These Taylor wrote down in a letter to his friend, Richard Woodhouse. Abbey came from the same village as Keats's grandmother, Colne, at the foot of Pendlekill in Yorkshire. He ought to have been, in the absence of a close family connection, just the man to give Taylor the information he wanted. In the case of Keats's mother, however, the picture he presents is so black that we can only hope that, as it has been proved incorrect in several particulars, his view of her was distorted and wrongheaded.

After describing Keats's grandfather, John Jennings, as too fond of the pleasures of the table, 'a complete Gourmand' (a statement which has at least a partial support in his death-certificate. He died of 'the Gout'), the Abbey memoir continues :

His Daughter in this respect somewhat resembled him, but she was more remarkably the Slave of other appetites, attributable probably to this for their exciting Cause.—At an early Age she told my Informant, Mr Abby, that she must & would have a Husband ; and her passions were so ardent, he said, that it was dangerous to be alone with her.—She was a handsome, little woman.—Her Features were good & regular, with the Exception of her Mouth which was unusually wide. A little circumstance was mentioned to me as indicative of her Character—She used to go to a Grocers in Bishops-gate Street, opposite the Church, probably out of some liking for the Owner of the Shop,—but the Man remarked to Mr Abby that Miss Jennings always came in dirty weather, & when she went away, she held up her Clothes very high in crossing the Street, & to be



GEORGE KEATS



sure, says the Grocer, has uncommonly handsome Legs.—He was not however fatally wounded by Cupid the Parthian.—

But it was not long before she found a Husband, nor did she go far for him—a Helper in her Father's Stables appeared sufficiently desirable in her Eyes to make her forget the Disparity of their Circumstances, & it was not long before John Keats had the Honor to be united to his Master's Daughter.—

The man whom Frances Jennings married on the 9th of October, 1794, was not 'John,' but Thomas; nor was he a mere helper in the stable but the head-ostler, a position of trust and responsibility. To this couple were born, after John, George in 1797, Tom in 1799, Edward who died in infancy in 1801, and in 1803, their daughter, Fanny.

Almost certainly before the birth of the younger children the family moved to Craven Street, City Road, half a mile away from the stables. The management of the business seems now to have been entirely in the hands of Thomas Keats. His parents-in-law had retired to Ponders End, a village in Middlesex. By 1804 it had become, by gift or purchase, the property of Thomas Keats.

On April the 15th, 1804, at thirty years of age, he met with a fatal accident which was reported in *The Times* for Tuesday, April the 17th, as follows :

On Sunday, Mr. Keats, livery-stable keeper in Moorfield, went to dine at Southgate; he returned at a late hour, and on passing down the City-road, his horse fell with him, when he had the misfortune to fracture his skull. It was about one o'clock in the morning when the watchman found him, he was at that time alive, but speechless; the watchman got assistance, and took him to a house in the neighbourhood, where he died about eight o'clock.

A similar notice appeared in *The Star* for April the 19th, and was repeated in *The Gentleman's Magazine* for May.

Cowden Clarke says that Thomas was returning from a visit to his boys who were at boarding-school at Enfield. Southgate is only a short distance from Enfield and he may well have followed up his visit to the school by dining with a friend there. Richard Abbey is reported to have said in regard to the accident :

He kept a remarkably fine horse for his own Riding, and on Sundays would go out with others who prided themselves in the like

Distinction, to Highgate, Highbury, or some other places of public Entertainment for Man and Horse.—At length on Sunday Night he was returning with some of his jolly Companions from a Carouse at one of these Places, riding very fast, and most probably very much in Liquor, when his Horse leaped upon the Pavement opposite the Methodist Chapel in the City Road, & falling with him against the Iron Railings so dreadfully crushed him that he died as they were carrying him Home.

If the newspaper account is to be trusted, Abbey was here drawing, either on imagination, or a faulty memory.

Frances Keats was now left at the age of twenty-nine with three growing boys and a baby girl. She had an adequate income, but its source was a livery-stable, a difficult business for a woman to superintend. There was, it is true, her father to whom she could turn, but as he died less than a year later, it is possible that he was too ill to give her much assistance. She had a brother, Midgley John Jennings, but he was an officer in the marines and probably away on service. Within three months, on the 27th of June, 1804, she became the wife of a William Rawlings. She married him, curiously enough, in the church at which her first marriage had taken place, St. George's, Hanover Square.

The reason she chose on both occasions to be married so far from her own parish is hard to seek. At her first marriage the register was not signed by her parents and this might suggest that they were not present. Perhaps they had disapproved or were not told of the wedding till after the event. On her second marriage, so soon after the death of her husband, she might not have wished to court the attention of neighbours in her own parish, but it seems, to say the least of it, odd to choose the church in which she had been married to Thomas Keats.

Taylor's version of Abbey's account of the second marriage, and of the subsequent career of Frances Rawlings, is as follows :

I think it was not much more than 8 Months after this Event that Mrs Keats again being determined to have a Husband, married Mr Rawlings, a Clerk in Smith Payne & Co's—I know very little of him, further than that he would have had a Salary of 700 £ eventually had he continued in his Situation.—I suppose therefore that he quitted it on becoming the Proprietor of the Livery Stables

by his Marriage with Mrs Keats, but how long the concern was carried on, or at what period Mr Jennings died, or relinquished it, I did not learn—It is perhaps sufficient to know that Rawlins also died after some little Time, and that his Widow was afterwards living as the Wife of a Jew at Enfield, named Abraham.

The statement that Rawlings was a clerk in 'Smith Payne & Co's' (Smith, Payne and Smiths of George Street, Mansion House, now the National Provincial Bank, Ltd.) is probably correct. In a letter written by the lawyer of Fanny Keats de Llanos (Keats's sister) in 1886 it is stated that Rawlings was at one time a bank clerk.

Mrs. Jennings, in strong disapproval of the second marriage, took the children away. Mrs. Rawlings herself soon left her husband who did not, as Abbey stated, die before her. Although there is in the London Directories no trace of him after 1811, he was certainly living in 1825: his name appears in Chancery proceedings in connection with the claim of Fanny Keats, of age in that year, on money due to her dead brother, Tom. The Jew named Abraham we might, for lack of corroborative evidence, reject as common City gossip. When a woman leaves her husband the public is apt to assume that she goes to another man.

The Jew named Abraham was not the only irregularity of conduct attributed to poor Frances by Richard Abbey. He said that after Thomas Keats's death she took to 'the Brandy Bottle' and that

The Growth of this degrading Propensity to liquor may account perhaps for the strange Irregularities—or rather Immorality of her after-Life—I should imagine that her children seldom saw her, and would hope that they knew not all her Conduct.

Much of this we know to be untrue. Frances Rawlings was with her mother and children for some years before her death. As there were only six years between that event and her second marriage, during several of which she lay ill, there could not have been much time for protracted 'Irregularities.'

Of Rawlings' character we know nothing. There must, however, have been some cause for the grandmother's drastic action in taking the children away. It seems likely that he was an adventurer. He had, according to Fanny Keats de

Llanos, no property whatever when he married her mother. Before the Married Woman's Property Act there was no lack of needy gentlemen willing to acquire property by marriage with a well-to-do woman. Having taken possession of the Swan and Hoop, Rawlings might not be sorry to rid himself of the grave encumbrance of four children. Soon he was to be free of their mother too. The departure of Frances might have been the result of deliberate action on his part. It was the habit of these men who preyed upon women to make the home so uncomfortable that the wife was glad to leave. Once having left her husband she had no further claim on him for support. He would remain sole master of her property which he had acquired by strictly legal methods.

Frances was an affectionate mother and not likely to let her children go willingly. She would, however, have no say in the matter. By her marriage with Rawlings she made her children his property. If he chose to hand them over to their grandmother she could only protest in vain.

Cowden Clarke had, unfortunately, only met with Keats's mother when she visited her boys at school. His description of her, however, gives a different impression from that of the Abbey memoir. He says she was tall (Abbey gives her as 'a little woman') 'of good figure, with large oval face and sensible deportment.' Indeed, to her sons Abbey himself gave a very different impression of their mother. According to George, he 'used to say he never saw a woman of the talents and sense of my grandmother, except my mother.' Of the direct opinion of the children we have only George's. John Keats was devoted to his mother, but we have no word of his about her. George does not seem to have remembered her well, although he was thirteen when she died, but this might be accounted for by her long illness and by the absence of the boys for the greater part of the year at boarding-school. He described her as 'a most excellent and affectionate parent and as I thought a woman of uncommon talents.' She was, according to him, ambitious for her boys intending, had their father lived, to send them to Harrow. 'She was confined to her bed many years before her death by a rheumatism and at last died of a Consumption.'

As John attended her in her last illness and she was con-

finer to her bed many years before it, it seems fairly safe to assume that when she left Rawlings, or soon after, she went to her mother.

It is a popular and perhaps well-founded belief that the mother of a man of genius transmits more to her son than his father. John Keats's mother, even discounting a good deal that Abbey is reported to have said against her, would appear to have been a woman of more sensibility than strength. It is true that in those days women were ill-educated and ill-prepared, by training or tradition, to face responsibilities, but a second marriage so soon after her husband's death might suggest undue weakness. Though if we chose rather to believe Abbey's statement to her children that she was a woman of 'talents and sense' we might assume in this second marriage a mere defiance of convention. After all, we cannot know whether she were happy or unhappy with Thomas Keats. If this were so, and Frances were not the weak, sensual woman suggested in the Abbey memoir, Keats had a heritage of strong sense, and possibly intellect, from both parents. Physically, however, he resembled his father, who was short and dark, with hazel eyes: possibly strength of feeling came from one parent and strength of mind from the other. His grandmother, too, was a woman of character. Abbey has nothing but good to say of Alice Jennings: 'She was a very different kind of woman' (different from her daughter) ' & when left to herself appears to have acted the part of a discreet Parent to the Children.' However it may be, somehow from these obscure folk there sprang a genius. But genius is, perhaps, the fine flower of a whole generation rather than of a family.

Of the baby Keats we have little information except one legend at third hand, said to emanate from a Mrs. Grafty of Craven Street, that when he was learning to speak he did not, as most babies do, merely echo what was said but would give a rime to the last word and then laugh. His mother was indulgent to her children and especially to her first-born whom, his brother said, she 'humoured in every whim, of which he had not a few.' Another story runs that at one time when his mother was ill and absolute quiet was ordered, he kept guard at her door with an old sword and allowed no one to enter. Benjamin Haydon, the painter,



in his *Autobiography* colours up this, or a similar story, into :

He was when an infant a most violent and ungovernable child. At five years of age or thereabouts, he once got hold of a naked sword and shutting the door swore nobody should go out. His mother wanted to do so, but he threatened her so furiously she began to cry, and was obliged to wait until somebody through the window saw her position and came to her rescue.

The sword may have been, in sober fact, a little iron one, this being a favourite toy far into the nineteenth century. However, the first of these stories of John's belligerent conduct demonstrates his undoubted devotion to his mother and both can remind us that he was born in war-time.

In 1795 we had been at war with France for nearly two years. In 1797 we were the sole antagonist by land and sea of the vigorous, militant Republic. The Keats boys had one and perhaps two family contacts with the wars. Cowden Clarke says that their uncle, Captain Midgley John Jennings, was the hero of the boys and that he had served with some credit on Duncan's flagship at the Battle of Camperdown. There is no record of the presence of Captain Jennings in this battle, but there was on H.M.S. *Powerful* a Lieutenant Ulick Jennings, R.N., and perhaps Cowden Clarke was here telescoping memories of two uncles. There is, however, only mention of one son in John Jennings' will.

In the early years of the new century England herself was threatened with invasion. Naughty children were subdued by the name of 'Boney' who in 1804 crowned himself Emperor of the French. The South Coast was ringed with Martello towers and many people who lived by the sea were afraid to undress at night for fear of a landing, of swift, sudden attack under cover of darkness. London was astir with preparations for home defence. Little boys were whipped into military ardour, both by tales of valour from abroad and drillings and marchings within their midst. Large bodies of Volunteers were raised. The Swan and Hoop stables were close to the ground of the Honourable Artillery Company. The exercising ground of the Clerkenwell Volunteers was on the south side of Corporation Lane; their regular field days were held in Tub Field adjoining Claremont Square

near to the Craven Street home of the Keatses. The Clerkenwell cavalry was composed of the richer tradesmen (was Thomas Keats among them?) who wore 'leathern breeches and boots and bearskin helmet cap, plumed with a white feather.' Did they ride on their fine, curvetting horses in and out of the Swan and Hoop? At the Grand Muster in Hyde Park in 1803 the London Volunteers were twenty-seven thousand strong.

In or about 1803 the two elder boys were sent to school at Enfield, a village within easy reach of their grandfather's house in Ponders End. They were 'not yet out of child's dress'; probably still wearing frocks for little boys were breeched late in those days. Their lives were yet unshadowed but soon their father's death came as the first of a series of domestic losses to darken their youth.

When they were taken from their mother the children must have gone to Ponders End, but on the death of their grandfather Mrs. Jennings moved to Edmonton. There John spent his holidays as an ordinary, happy little boy, playing, quarrelling, scuffling with his brothers and showing no extraordinary mental powers. He rambled about joyfully in the lanes and meadows and along the lovely Pymmes brook as it ran to join the River Lea. He had the natural boy's thoughtless love of catching and meddling with the creatures of the wild. . . . 'Goldfinches, Tomtits, Minnows, Mice, Ticklebacks, Dace, Cock salmon and all the whole tribe of the Bushes and the Brooks.' Reviving these childish memories in a letter to his sister in 1819 he added, 'but verily they are better in the Trees and the water . . .' He wrote in some delightful rimes to her :

There was a naughty boy  
And a naughty boy was he  
He kept little fishes  
In washing tubs three  
In spite  
Of the might  
Of the Maid  
Nor affraid  
Of his Granny-good—  
He often would  
Hurly burly  
Get up early

And go  
 By hook or crook  
 To the brook  
 And bring home  
 Miller's thumb  
 Tittle bat  
 Not overfat  
 Minnows small  
 As the stall  
 Of a glove  
 Not above  
 The size  
 Of a nice  
 Little Baby's  
 Little finger—  
 O he made  
 'Twas his trade  
 Of Fish a pretty Kettle  
 A Kettle—A Kettle  
 Of Fish a pretty Kettle  
 A Kettle !

Fanny Keats herself wrote when she was nearly eighty: 'I well remember . . . our pleasure in keeping little fish (called minnows I think) and his love of birds, especially a favourite Tom Tit.' The little sister was not excluded from the boyish pleasures. The boys were devoted to one another but even more devoted to their little sister whose favour each tried, by artful schemes for her amusement, to gain for himself.

From some lines in *Endymion* it would appear that Keats liked to make little ships to float upon the brook :

Of moulted feathers, touchwood, alder chips,  
 With leaves stuck in them ; and the Neptune be  
 Of their petty ocean.

To these poetic clues to Keats's boyish life there may perhaps be added a third. Craven Street was conveniently near to Sadlers Wells Theatre. Mrs. Keats was, we know, fond of amusement. At Easter in 1804 there was inaugurated in the theatre a form of entertainment which was to survive into the twenties, the Aquatic Theatre. Real water was brought in from the New River and, at the first performance upon it, 'real ships of 100, 74 and 60 guns built rigged and manœuvred in the most correct manner' fired their broadsides. The play

was *The Siege of Gibraltar* in which 'the gallant Sir Roger Curtis appeared in his boat to save the drowning Spaniards, the British Tars for that purpose plunging into the water.' This exciting entertainment was, if he were taken to see it, one which must have impressed Keats's imagination. The name of it was *Naumachia* and it may have led to his use of this Greek word in that curious sonnet: 'Before he went to feed with owls and bats.' Nebuchadnezzar's 'ugly dream' was:

Worse than an Hus'ifs's when she thinks her cream  
Made a *Naumachia* for mice and rats,

The word *Naumachia*, however, occurs in the dictionary Keats was in the habit of using, Bailey's.

In the July following her daughter's death Mrs. Jennings, now seventy-four, chose two guardians for her grandchildren. Her son, Midgley John Jennings, had died in 1808 and there was apparently now no relative to whom she could confine their care. The only other known relations of the Keats are Mary Sweetingburgh, a sister of John Jennings and, by marriage, Mrs. Midgley Jennings.

The men Mrs. Jennings chose were John Rowland Sandell and Richard Abbey, tea-dealer. 'In consideration of the natural love and affection which she had for them' she at once made over, to be held in trust for the benefit of her grandchildren, most of the property she derived from her late husband. Out of John Jennings' fortune of over thirteen thousand pounds, three thousand, nine hundred went to his son, two hundred a year to Mrs. Jennings, fifty pounds a year to his daughter and one thousand pounds to be held in trust for his grandchildren to be divided among them when the youngest came of age. In his will Mr. Jennings had not provided for his entire capital, and the family unwisely submitted the disposal of the surplus to the dilatory Court of Chancery. The money was held up for twenty years while the suit dragged on. When at length it was paid out John and Tom were dead. To this Chancery suit most of the brothers' financial difficulties appear to be due. Their father at his death had made no will and his personal estate of under two thousand pounds went, one presumes, into the pockets of William Rawlings. Their mother had nothing

to leave them; her fifty pounds annuity went back into the estate at her death.

Mrs. Jennings lived only four more years. Within the short space of ten years the children were deprived of the love and care of parents, grandparents and uncle. Rowland Sandell soon renounced the trust and they came into the sole charge of the thick-sighted tea-dealer, Richard Abbey.

## CHAPTER II

### *School-days and Apprenticeship (1803-1815)*

MATTHEW ARNOLD, REFERRING TO KEATS'S OWN STATEMENT, 'I think I shall be among the English poets after my death,' added, 'he is—he is with Shakespeare.'

In the preparation for his high destiny Keats was with Shakespeare. They both had the limited education of a middle-class boy and, to complete it, they ranged freely among the English writers and moved among men. They sounded the depths of the heart's suffering and rose to the heights of creative imagination. They both had a quick and capacious intellect, a love of life and of their fellow-beings and the humour which enables a man to see in true perspective. Keats later, it is true, felt the gaps in his knowledge and set to work to fill them up with an intensity probably beyond his failing strength, but though he had no Greek he came closer to the Greek spirit than any other English writer. And is not *Julius Caesar*, with all its anachronisms, more Roman in feeling than the more correct plays of the scholar, Ben Jonson? The intuitive spirit of genius carries a man far and perhaps he had better not be bound too tightly in chains in his boyhood.

Mrs. Keats is credited with a desire to send her sons to Harrow. Harrow was still in the grip of the classics, and the boys spent their days in construing. The greatest gain to Keats might have been a fine library, but he managed to obtain, mainly by borrowing, enough books to quicken his imagination into life and to produce, within four short years, poetry that will live throughout the ages.

In reality Keats was singularly fortunate in his school. At a tender age he came under the influence of John Clarke, 'a man of nobly liberal opinions, of refined taste in literature . . . as gentle-hearted as he was wise, and as wise as he was

gentle-hearted.' He must, too, have been a man of considerable courage. While Leigh Hunt was under sentence for his attack in the *Examiner* on the Prince Regent, Clarke sent his son to the prison in Horsemonger Lane every week with baskets of vegetables and eggs. Although the Prince was unpopular and Liberal opinion was with the Hunt brothers, headmasters cannot usually afford to go against the established order of things. There must have been among the tradesmen fathers of his pupils many staunch 'Bible-crown-and-Constitution' men who would look askance at an acknowledgment of sympathy with a notorious Radical and rebel.

As a schoolmaster Clarke was years ahead of his time. He relied not on the cane to stimulate his scholars to learning, but upon kindness and a system of marks and awards. Each boy had an account book into which was put a mark against each task achieved. Prizes were given for voluntary work done out of school hours. His humanity and the results he obtained filled the school. We do not know whether the curriculum was freer and wider than that of the typical school of that day, but there was certainly at one period a native French master, an *émigré*.

So John Keats escaped the monotony and the brutality of the contemporary Public School and his young spirit was given room to grow. The direct influence on him of such a man as John Clarke can only be surmised, but we are on firmer ground with his son, Charles Cowden Clarke, who was an usher in the school, and at the age of only fourteen or fifteen had taught Keats his first lessons. 'Ever-young' Cowden Clarke was a healthy-minded, intelligent man with a buoyant spirit. He was tolerably well-read in the classics and he felt strongly that revived interest in the Elizabethan writers fostered by Coleridge, Lamb and later by Hazlitt. He nursed the mental growth of the young poet with affectionate care.

The school was at Enfield, a village about ten miles from London, in a country of beautiful elm-bordered fields, rose-hedgerowed lanes, meadows and wooded estates. It stood opposite to a bend in the New River in which the boys used to bathe. Disdaining the use of towels, they would dry themselves by running about the fields. Further up the road from the schoolhouse was a small, wooded slope, a remnant

of the old Enfield Chase which, as a boy, Cowden Clarke used to imagine as 'a forest peopled with dragons, lions, ladies, knights, dwarfs and giants.' It could be seen from one of the school windows. The road led on to, and terminated in Ponders End where Keats's grandparents lived until the death of John Jennings in 1805.

The schoolhouse was a fine building. It had been erected by a West India merchant and bore the date 1717. It was almost certainly the birthplace of Isaac Disraeli in 1766. In 1849 it was bought by the Eastern Counties Railway and became the station-house for the branch brought from the Ware and Cambridge line to Enfield. In 1872 it was pulled down, but the top part of the old front was preserved and re-erected in the Victoria and Albert Museum. It is classic in feeling. Two foliated capitals support a pediment. Between the pilasters are two niches and in the arches of these are winged cherubs' heads in moulded brick. Above each niche is a garland of flowers and pomegranates in the same medium. The workmanship is beautiful. The bricks, small and of a rich rose colour, have been ground down to a perfect face and joined, not with lime and mortar but beeswax and resin, so that the whole front is a solid block. The niches and ornamental work were cut out with a chisel. Between the central pillars was a window with a lead flat beneath on which a curious boy could creep surreptitiously to examine the decoration he had heard praised by his elders. Cowden Clarke made this little adventure once when he was put to sleep in the room between the niches during some childsh illness. He gave in his old age a charming description of the school :

The house, airy, roomy, and substantial . . . was especially fitted for a school. "The eight-bedded room," "the six-bedded room," as they were called, give some idea of the dimensions of the apartments. The school-room, which occupied the site where formerly had been the coach-house and stabling, was forty feet long ; and the playground was a spacious courtyard between the school-room and the house. In this play-ground there flourished a goodly baking-pear tree ; and it was made a point of honour with "the boys" that if they forebore from touching the fruit until fit for gathering, they would have it in due time for supper regales, properly baked or stewed.



From the playground stretched a garden one hundred yards in length, where in one corner were some small plots set aside for certain boys fond of having a garden of their own . . . and farther on was a sweep of greensward, beyond which existed a pond, sometimes dignified as "The Lake" . . . Round this pond sloped strawberry-beds, the privilege of watering which was awarded to "assiduous boys" on summer evenings, with the due understanding that they would have their just share of the juicy red berries when fully ripe. At the far end of the pond . . . beneath the iron railings which divided our premises from the meadow beyond, whence the song of the nightingales in May would reach us in the stillness of night, there stood a rustic arbour, where John Keats and I used to sit and read Spenser's "Faery Queene" together, when he had left school, and used to come over from Edmonton, where he was apprenticed to Thomas Hammond the surgeon. On the other side of the house lay a small enclosure which we called "the drying-ground," and where was a magnificent morello cherry-tree . . . Beyond this, a gate led into a small field, or paddock, of two acres,—the pasture-ground of two cows that supplied the establishment with fresh and abundant milk.

Not far from the house there was a rookery. The boys used to see the birds flying home to roost in the evening and, as they watched the long, black train, they would cry: 'Lag, lag, laglast!'

In his old age Cowden Clarke wrote his reminiscences of Keats's schooldays. Looking back over the long years he tried to recollect the little boy who came to Enfield dressed in a child's frock with his brother in 1803; but he could not 'from a corporation of seventy or eighty youngsters' distinguish him very clearly. He remembered that the boy had 'a brisk, winning face' and that he was a particular favourite of Mrs. Clarke, his mother. The boys were visited from time to time by their parents, who came out from the City in a gig driven by Thomas Keats, whom Mr. and Mrs. Clarke liked and respected; he was of 'so remarkably fine a common-sense and native respectability; a man utterly free from vulgarity.' But Thomas Keats was not long to visit his boys. In 1804 came the tragedy of his sudden death.

As a little boy Keats showed no sign of exceptional powers. He worked well and was 'a most orderly scholar' but, like the average healthy boy, he liked playing better than working and he liked fighting best of all; it was 'meat and drink to

him.' Although small for his age, he was strong and athletic and had the courage of a lion. 'He would fight anyone—morning, noon and night.' All three brothers (later Tom entered the school) felt they had, as the nephews of Captain Midgley Jennings, a family reputation for valour to keep up. George, although the strongest and tallest, was the least belligerent. Edward Holmes, a schoolfellow, said of Keats: '... He was a boy whom anyone from his extraordinary vivacity and personal beauty might easily fancy would become great—but rather in some military capacity than in literature... in all active exercises he excelled.' Holmes had a great admiration for the generous-hearted, daring boy and, being some years his junior, had to woo his friendship by doing battle. He speaks of his 'violence and vehemence,' saying that his moods were 'always in extremes,' and that he would often be either in a passion of tears or fits of outrageous laughter. 'Associated as they were with an extraordinary beauty of person and expression, these qualities captivated the boys, and no one was more popular.'

He made few close friends; his brothers were so dear to him that probably they were all he needed. 'The favourites of John,' said Holmes, 'were few; after they were known to fight readily he seemed to prefer them for a sort of grotesque and buffoon humour. I recollect at this moment his delight at the extraordinary gesticulations of a boy named Wade who was celebrated for this.'

He was, although apparently far from being the conventional 'good boy,' a favourite with the masters too. No doubt they felt him, with his daring, his 'terrier courage and great charm,' to be an influence in the school, and, with 'his high-mindedness, his utter unconsciousness of a mean motive, his placability, his generosity,' a good influence too. He was, however, too much the natural human boy to become a prig. It was fortunate, perhaps, that his younger brother was taller and stronger than he and could administer effective and salutary chastisement. Keats's temper was fiery and when he was in a rage his more placid brother would hold him down by main force, laughing as John roared and tried to beat him. But John's temper never lasted long; it was a 'wisp-of-straw conflagration.' The struggle generally ended in affectionate laughter on both sides.

Perhaps this early pugnacity was in some measure an outlet for a crude creative power already within him. Cowden Clarke says that his fighting temper when roused 'was one of the most picturesque exhibitions—off the stage—I ever saw. One of the transports of that marvellous actor Edmund Kean—whom, by the way, he idolized—was its nearest resemblance; and the two were not very dissimilar in face and figure.' This was not the mere blind hitting out of a furious child but something controlled; a natural acting. One of his small gestures had a minor splendour. One day his little brother Tom was rude to an usher and had his ears boxed. 'John rushed up, put himself in the received position of offence, and, it was said, struck the usher—who could, so to say, have put him in his pocket.'

It was not until his fifteenth year that Keats turned passionately to books and study. Up to that time he had read little with profound attention. Among his early reading Holmes remembered *Robinson Crusoe* and 'something about Montezuma and the Incas of Peru.' He thought that Keats must have read Shakespeare early; he remembered him saying: 'No one would care to read *Macbeth* alone in a house at two o'clock in the morning.' It is possible, however, that he was familiar with the story in Lamb's *Tales*, published in 1806, when he was ten.

Most children of higher mental powers than the average have known that sudden flowering of the spirit in adolescence; when school subjects begin to fall into place in a scheme and learning acquires a meaning and a vitality. To Keats in the richness of his nature this must have been an astounding revelation; with his usual impetuosity and passionate self-devotion he turned whole-heartedly to books. Now the 'active exercises,' the running, jumping, fighting and swimming were forgotten; he had to be driven away from study into the open air by the masters. Even then he would be found walking with a book in his hand. 'The quantity he read was surprising.' He soon exhausted the school library, from which he obtained books of voyages and travel, Mavor's collection and his *Universal History*, Robertson's histories of Scotland, America and Charles the Fifth, and the stories, including Miss Edgeworth's, thought fit for youth in the early days of the nineteenth century.

*Pilgrim's Progress* would have been in the library and probably a few volumes of natural history, including Goldsmith's delightful book with its spirited woodcuts. He steeped himself in classical mythology, constantly poring over Spence's *Polymetis*, Tooke's *Pantheon*, Fénelon and Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*, 'which he appeared to learn.' He also studied, either now or in his apprenticeship days, Sandys' translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. 'His amount of classical attainment extended no farther than the *Æneid*, with which epic, indeed, he was so fascinated that before leaving school he had *voluntarily* translated in writing a considerable portion.'

Every minute snatched from his lessons or enforced exercise was devoted to reading, even at meals. His studies were not entirely in the past, for Clarke says :

... in my 'mind's eye' I now see him at supper (we had our meals in the schoolroom) sitting back on the form, from the table, holding the folio volume of Burnet's "History of his Own Times" between himself and the table, eating his meal from beyond it. This work, and Leigh Hunt's *Examiner*—which my father took in, and I used to lend to Keats—no doubt laid the foundation of his love of civil and religious liberty.

At each half-year he won the prize given by John Clarke for the greatest amount of voluntary work, and he won it easily, the work he had done far exceeded that of any other boy. In 1809 he was awarded Kauffman's *Dictionary of Merchandise*. Was he able to keep his mobile face in the conventional lines of a grateful smile when his eye fell on this unpromising title? Perhaps he handed the volume on at once to George who was destined for a commercial career. In 1811 he was awarded John Bonnycastle's new edition of his *Introduction to Astronomy*.

The *Introduction to Astronomy* is a lively, well-written book. The subject is handled with imagination. The vastness of the firmament is conveyed with a perception of its essential beauty as revealing the primal power of the Creator. Quotations from the poets are introduced 'as an agreeable relief to minds unaccustomed to the regular deduction of facts.' Most of the quotations are from Milton; others from translations of the classics, from Thomson, Pope, Young and Samuel Butler and all are finely chosen. It seems likely that

Keats read this book with attention. He certainly valued it enough to make a present of it to George on his departure from England in 1818. The account in it of the discovery of Uranus or Georgium Sidus by Herschel may have helped to produce those ringing lines :

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken ;

There is, too, on page 6 of the book, a reference to 'Lapland witches, who pretend to regulate the course of the winds by tying knots in a string.' These fantastic witches may have sunk deep down into his mind to come to the surface years later in a detail of his word-picture of the Enchanted Castle in the Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds :

Then there's a little wing, far from the Sun,  
Built by a Lapland Witch turned maudlin Nun.

Keats's happy absorption in books and study was, in or before 1810, broken by anxiety over his mother. She had developed tuberculosis. During a period of her last illness (probably in the Christmas holidays of 1809) Keats, then a boy of fourteen, 'sat up whole nights with her in a great chair, would suffer nobody to give her medicine, or even cook her food, but himself, and read novels to her in her intervals of ease.' He went back to school apparently lulled into a false security, for when news of her death came in March, the blow was all the more severe because it was unexpected. He was heart-broken. He gave way, said Cowden Clarke, 'to such impassioned and prolonged grief (hiding himself under the master's desk) as awakened the liveliest pity and sympathy in all who saw him.'

John and George both left school at the end of the summer of 1811 ; George to enter Mr. Abbey's counting-house and John to be bound apprentice for five years to Thomas Hammond, surgeon and apothecary. This choice of a profession has been a continued source of astonishment to posterity. Cowden Clarke implies that it was chosen for him by his guardian as a means of livelihood. It seems, however, unlikely that a boy of Keats's spirit would submit tamely to enter a profession he hated. During his apprenticeship

Cowden Clarke, who was only eight years older than Keats, was his intimate friend. If he had felt discontent he would surely have murmured it to Clarke. He did not and it was, according to Clarke, not until he was on the eve of abandoning medicine that he expressed a dislike for it. It seems probable that he had a genuine wish to become a doctor, and that it was not until he knew himself to be a poet that he decided to abandon the profession.

It is barely possible that an ambition to be a doctor may have originated in very early childhood. Finsbury Square and its environs were the headquarters of the City physicians and surgeons, some of whom would almost certainly keep their horses in the nearby stables. The bright-eyed, quick-witted boy may have drawn their notice. Attention from them might have roused in his small breast an ambition to be a doctor too.

Hammond's house, 'Wilston,' at Edmonton, remained in the occupation of a doctor until it was pulled down in 1931. In the garden was a small building, consisting of a surgery and a room above, reached by an outside staircase, known locally as Keats's Cottage. Here, traditionally, he worked and lived.

It was no doubt a pleasure to Keats that his youngest brother was still at school at Enfield during part of his apprenticeship. His intimacy with Cowden Clarke must have made intercourse with Tom easier and more frequent during term-time. There were two of Tom's schoolfellows who took a keen interest in the elder brother; Charles Jeremiah Wells and Robert Hengist Horne. Wells was a clever, red-headed boy brimming over with healthy animal spirits. Keats was attracted by him and later made him a friend.

Among the boys at Enfield it was natural that the reputation Keats had left behind him was not that of an assiduous scholar, but of a keen fighter. One cold winter's day while his master was on professional attendance within, Keats was sitting outside the school in a gig. His thoughts were far away from a little group of admiring lads gaping at the 'old boy' with such a formidable reputation as a 'bruiser.' Horne was dared to snowball him. He accepted the challenge and hit Keats full in the back, but even before Keats could attach the reins

in order to come in pursuit of him he took the precaution of instant flight.

Beyond the 'Keats Cottage' tradition and stories of day-dreaming in the gig we have no information about Keats's work with Hammond except that his duties were not arduous. A fellow-apprentice described him as 'an idle loafing fellow, always quoting poetry.' The known integrity of his character does not, however, suggest a neglect of duties. Perhaps Hammond, like many men who were glad to take the fees of apprentices, did not make full use of him. It is evident from the Abbey memoir quoted in Chapter I that his guardian was dissatisfied with Hammond's treatment of him. Or, alternatively, this accusation may be purely the jealous view of an ignorant lad who came in at the usual apprenticeship fee of forty pounds and had his time more fully occupied in menial tasks. According to George, Abbey paid to Hammond the much larger sum of two hundred guineas on Keats's behalf.

Keats himself seems to have felt some antagonism towards Hammond; he wrote in 1819 of having seven years before clenched his fist at him. It seems more than likely that there were occasional brushes between the proud high-spirited boy and his master.

Whether he neglected his duties or no, he certainly had time for reading and study. He finished his translation of the *Æneid* into prose and eagerly devoured Cowden Clarke's library of books. At least five times a month he would walk over the two miles of field-path to Enfield, book in hand, to revel in poetry with his old usher who was but eight years his senior.

The two young men, children of their age, although able to appreciate intellectually 'the sharp, the rapier-pointed epigram,' could see no beauty in the typical poets of the last century:

. . . closely wed  
To musty laws lined out with wretched rule  
And compass vile. . . .

with their formal didacticism. They turned with passionate attention to the older poets. Shakespeare was already familiar, and now Clarke, reading to Keats in the little arbour in the school garden, aroused his enthusiasm for other great

Elizabethans and Jacobeans, including Milton in his earlier romantic poetry and, above all, Edmund Spenser.

Through Spenser 'at the touch of Archimago's wand' Keats entered into an entire new world; a world enchanting to a romantic boy. Here were the familiar knights and ladies of a child's tale transmuted in a light that never was on sea or land. The gallant boy who had squared up to the usher twice his size went adventuring with gentle Una and her milk-white lamb in strange and monstrous woods. One day Cowden Clarke read the 'Epithalamium' aloud to him and 'as he listened his features and exclamations were ecstatic.' The tender bright beauty of the poem lit up his young mind. The passage to 'Cynthia' may well have sown the seed of the long-pondered *Endymion*:

O ! fayrest goddesse, do not thou envy  
My love with me to spy :  
For thou likewise didst love, though now unthought,  
And for a fleece of wooll, which privily  
The Latmian shepherd once unto thee brought,  
His pleasures with thee wrought.

'That night he took away with him a volume of the *Faerie Queene*, and he went through it as a young horse through a spring meadow—ramping!' Spenser was like 'a clear sunrise' to his mind and the craftsman already awake in him savoured 'Spenserian vowels that elope with ease.'

No doubt in soberer moments the two young men talked of the Liberal question; of the need for drastic reform in government and the misery of the common people; of the imprisonment of 'the lov'd Libertas,' Leigh Hunt and of Cowden Clarke's visits to him. Keats had always a great love for pianoforte music and sometimes Cowden Clarke would play to him. There was an old school memory of Cowden Clarke's music-making, heard intermittently from below as he lay in bed, which later he put into the twenty-ninth stanza of 'The Eve of St. Agnes':

The boisterous, midnight, festive clarion,  
The kettle-drum, and far-heard clarinet,  
Affray his ears, though but in dying tone :—  
*The hall door shuts again, and all the noise is gone.*



In another way Clarke must have been a stimulating influence. Keats in his letters often deploras his 'horrid morbidity of temperament' and the sanguine Cowden Clarke with the hearty manner and rather loud voice must have been the antithesis of him. Adolescence has its natural glooms and these must have been deeper in the hypersensitive boy smarting under the loss of his mother. Contact with the older man would bring a salutary bracing of the spirit. The influence of home, of the sensible Mrs. Jennings, was not wanting either for his grandmother lived in the same road only a short distance from 'Wilston,' Hammond's residence.

In December, 1814, the strongest family link was snapped with the death of Mrs. Jennings. The Edmonton home was broken up. George, and probably Tom, had already gone into Abbey's counting-house in the City and now the little sister went away into the unsympathetic care of Mr. and Mrs. Abbey.

Keats felt acutely his grandmother's death. He was tenderly attached to her. A few days after the event he wrote a sonnet and, with characteristic reticence, did not disclose even to his brothers the circumstance of its composition. It was not until 1819, when grief was long past, that in answer to a direct question he told Richard Woodhouse how it came to be written. Woodhouse made a note to the effect in shorthand which has recently been transcribed by Professor H. W. Garrod.<sup>1</sup> We now know the sonnet to be one of the earliest written :

As from the darkening gloom a silver dove  
 Upsoars, and darts into the Eastern light,  
 On pinions that naught moves but pure delight,  
 So fled thy soul into the realms above,  
 Regions of peace and everlasting love ;  
 Where happy spirits, crown'd with circlets bright  
 Of starry beam, and gloriously bedight,  
 Taste the high joy none but the blest can prove.  
 There thou or joinest the immortal quire  
 In melodies that even Heaven fair  
 Fill with superior bliss, or, at desire  
 Of the omnipotent Father, cleavest the air  
 On holy message sent—What pleasures higher ?  
 Wherefore does any grief our joy impair ?

<sup>1</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, Dec. 19th, 1936.

It is probable that Keats was now discontented and lonely at Edmonton. Even if Hammond were not the careless master Abbey suspected him to be, his apprentice would, with his quick intellect, have learned from him all he had to offer in a far shorter time than the average boy. The clenching of his fist at his master has been held to suggest that the breaking of the apprenticeship in 1815 was caused by an open breach between Keats and Hammond. This may have been so, but it was not, however, uncommon for an apprenticeship to a surgeon to be broken. This fact is made clear in the evidence given before a Select Committee on Medical Education in 1834, only nineteen years later.

On October 1st, 1815, Keats, bearing with him the necessary certificate of good behaviour from Hammond, entered Guy's Hospital in the Borough, London, to train as an apothecary in the joint medical school of Guy's and St. Thomas's.

## CHAPTER III

### *A Medical Student (1815-1816)*

**F**ROM HIS LODGINGS NEAR TO GUY'S HOSPITAL KEATS WROTE to Cowden Clarke :

Although the Borough is a beastly place in dirt, turnings and windings; yet No 8 Dean Street is not difficult to find; and if you would run the Gauntlet over London Bridge, take the first turning to the left and then the first to the right and moreover knock at my door which is nearly opposite a Meeting, you would do one a Charity . . .

Cowden Clarke was then living with a married sister in Clerkenwell. In crossing the ancient, narrow Bridge he would 'run the Gauntlet' probably of the long whips of the carters who drove the waggons drawn by six or eight horses to and from the market gardens of Kent and Surrey. As there were only three bridges over the Thames at that time other traffic was thick too. Having crossed with no damage to life or clothing Clarke would come upon 'a jumbled mass of murky buildings'; gloomy hop-warehouses and a tangle of mean streets (some of them now gone, together with St. Thomas's Hospital and part of Dean Street itself, to make place for London Bridge Station) swarming with people in the extreme of poverty, many of them Irish living in unspeakable squalor. The streets immediately round the hospitals were of a better type and in them the students lodged. What is left of Dean Street is now Stainer Street; the house in which Keats lodged was half-way down it. The students were obliged to live very close to the hospitals. The average course was only one year and lectures and demonstrations were spread over the day so as not to overlap. The first lecture was at a quarter to eight in the morning and the last at eight o'clock at night.

On October 1st, 1815 (a Sunday), Keats was entered in the Register of Surgeon's Pupils as 'No. 57, 6 Mo' and paid an office fee of one pound, two shillings. For the next day this entry appears: 'John Keats, (Mr. L) 12 Mo. £25. 4.' At the side is written in, probably later, '6 Mo.' The explanation of this would appear to be that, in view of the fact that he soon became a dresser, six months' fee (£6. 6s.) was returned to him. On October 29th there is a further entry in the Registers recording the return of the six guineas to John Keats, 'he becoming a dresser.' None of the other pupils entered in the same quarter became dresser in so short a time. This would argue an unusual proficiency in Hammond's late apprentice. It is thought at Guy's that if a student became a dresser he was only required to remain six months in the medical school. On March 3rd, 1816, Keats appears under 'Dressers to the Surgeons' with the entry '12 Mo. £1. 1.'

It has been suggested that if Keats had been attached to the skilful and charming Astley Cooper (who by his knight-hood in future years raised surgery from a trade to a profession) he might have been inspired to do great things in Medicine. This we cannot know but it is certain that 'Mr. L' was neither skilful nor charming. Although Lucas was 'good-natured and easy and liked by everyone' he was

A tall ungainly, awkward man, with stooping shoulders and a shuffling walk, as deaf as a post, not overburdened with brains . . . His surgical acquirements were very small, his operations generally badly performed, and accompanied with much bungling, if not worse.

Beyond the above entries in the registers of Guy's we have little detail at first-hand of Keats as medical student. As, however, nearly five years of his brief life were spent in the service of Medicine it seems worth while to try to reconstruct life in the Hospital from contemporary accounts and from others not far removed in date.

The surgeon was responsible for the first few dressings after an operation and went round the ward twice a week accompanied by four dressers, each of whom carried a 'tin plaister box,' in shape not unlike a knife-box and 'considered a mark of distinction as shewing their official position.' All

wore their hats. They were accompanied by students 'in shoals, if the surgeon was a favourite,' who

pushed and jostled, and ran and crowded round the beds, quite regardless of the patient's feelings and condition . . . The whole business was concluded in an hour and a half. Certainly not much was to be learned at these 'goings round'; they were mostly occupied with chattering and playing, and making extra-hospital arrangements.

Pupils who were keen to learn, however, seem to have had the freedom of the wards to study and care for the patients. They were allowed to assist the dressers to carry out the surgeon's orders.

Guy's and St. Thomas's stood opposite to one another and Friday was operation day in both hospitals. Operations were performed at noon in Guy's and at one o'clock at St. Thomas's. The students would attend at Guy's and then rush over in an unseemly, struggling mass to get good seats at St. Thomas's where the operating theatre was small. 'The rush and scuffle there to get a place was not unlike that for a seat in the pit or gallery of a dramatic theatre, and the crowding and squeezing was oftentimes unbearable.' John Flint South, from whose 'Memorials' much of this material is taken, says :

The pupils were packed like herrings in a barrel, but not so quiet, as those behind were continually pressing on those before, often so severely that several could not bear the pressure, and were continually struggling to relieve themselves of it, and had not infrequently to be got out exhausted. There was also a continual cry of 'Heads, heads', to those about the table whose heads interfered with the sight-seers, with various appellatives, in a small way resembling the calls at the Sheldonian Theatre during Commemoration . . . I have often known the floor so crowded that the surgeon could not operate till it had been partially cleared.

The feelings of the patient, stretched out on a dirty, blood-stained table, can be imagined, especially as he had to undergo the operation without anæsthetic. South says :

So long as the patient did not make much noise, I got on very well, but if the cries were great, and especially if they came from a child, I was quickly upset, had to leave the theatre and not infrequently fainted . . . the atmosphere was stifling.

It is recorded that Sir Astley Cooper, tried and skilful operator though he was, once when a little child patient was brought to him and smiled up at him from her grandfather's arms, burst into tears. As the surgery to be performed by most of these pupils in the future would be of a minor character, attendance at many of the operations seems to have been cruelly unnecessary. Minor surgery, such as venesection (bloodletting) was learnt in the wards.

Keats had to attend lectures on Anatomy and Surgery, the practice of Medicine, chemistry, midwifery, and other kindred subjects; also *Materia Medica*, botanical work being done on this subject, under the superintendence of the lecturer, in the Herb Garden at Chelsea and in the country surrounding London. Away from the macabre surroundings of pain, sickness and suffering, this must have been a joyful interlude in the poet's working day. Much of his time would be spent in the dead-house in practical anatomy. Conditions here might, after the preliminary initiation<sup>1</sup> (accompanied in some hospitals apparently, according to an unwritten law, by the standing of two pots of beer by the novice) to some extent have hardened the student to the horrible conditions of the operating theatre. There was a total lack of reverence for the dead. The injecting-room seems to have been used as a species of common-room by the students 'amidst a heterogeneous assemblage of pipkins, subjects (bodies), deal coffins, sawdust, inflated stomachs, syringes, macerating tubs and dried preparations.' Here, and in the dissecting-room, they drank, 'broiled sprats and herrings on the fire-shovel,' and the brighter spirits indulged in horse-play to the detriment of fittings and furniture.

The lectures of Astley Cooper, a brilliant and amusing man, were always well attended. There is in the Keats Museum, Hampstead, a little leather-covered book which, in the opinion of Sir William Hale-White, contains notes of lectures delivered by the great surgeon. Amid the serious and scientific entries there is one delightful and human touch that we can imagine Keats writing down with a curl of his wide, humorous mouth: 'In disease medical men guess, if they cannot ascertain a disease they call it nervous.' Sir William considers

<sup>1</sup> The details to the end of the paragraph are taken from 'The Medical Student,' *Punch*, 1841, by Albert Smith, a student twenty years later.

that the note-book shews Keats to have been a careful student. On one page there are some delightful drawings of flowers. As it was the custom then to repeat each statement three times it is strange that there are not more of these idyllic interludes in the note-taking : but Astley Cooper was an exceptional man and demanded close attention. Some of the other lectures must have been intolerably tedious to a man of Keats's rapidity of mind ; those of Henry Cline, Junior, for instance, who ' went on in a quiet, monotonous tone, and very slowly,' always prolonging the lecture by half or three-quarters of an hour. Many of the students wisely abstained from attendance.

As the place of the modern house-surgeon was then taken by the dressers Keats had to shoulder a good deal of responsibility. A week at a time each took charge in the ward, living in the hospital at his own expense. Theoretically he spent his whole time there but in practice he took some hours off away from the hospital, spending the night within its walls and always within call in case of need. Thursday was ' taking-in ' day for the surgical cases and every day he attended to all accidents. He ' dressed hosts of out-patients, drew innumerable teeth, and performed countless venesections, till two or three o'clock . . . till the surgery was empty.' He had to use his judgment in discriminating from among the out-patients those cases he considered should be brought to the notice of the surgeon on his visit.

Work in the wards must have been gruesome enough in those rough-and-ready days when, the germ theory being unknown, rigid cleanliness was not considered a necessity. A dark hint of the physical conditions is given in the old registers by the entry of an annual salary of forty pounds to the Bug-catcher. The nurses and night-watchers were of the ' Mrs. Gamp ' variety. Wounds, with no aseptic precautions, became infected and many patients died. But more gruesome still, grotesque and macabre, were those extraordinary muffled figures which came under cover of night with their ghastly burdens. This was the era of the ' resurrection-men,' the ' sack-em-up gentlemen ' on whom the surgeons were forced to rely for supplies to the Anatomical Schools. Wild, abandoned, drink-sodden, they were capable of any audacity in their search for their unlawful prey. In the ridiculous



TOM KEATS  
By Joseph Severn





state of the law body-snatching was a misdemeanour but the taking of the shroud a crime: the bodies, therefore, were brought stark naked in sacks. The price paid varied as to size, four guineas being the maximum. The notorious gang of Ben Crouch's, son of the carpenter at Guy's, supplied the hospital. It is more than likely that Keats had dealings with these ruffians.

In Keats's medical training he ran the gamut of human nature from the low to the high. He saw in men like Astley Cooper an inspired devotion to duty in a painful profession: from body-snatcher to surgeon; from pain to the joy of recovery; from the misery of the sick to the cheerful companionship of the young men around him; from arduous duty to the high delights of poetry; these were magnificent preparations for the master dramatist he might have been, and the great poet he was. They were magnificent preparations but at the cost of strain in mind and spirit: a deeply conscientious man, he knew his heart was not in his work.

Keats was not happy living by himself. His frequent depressions of spirit were aggravated by loneliness and the creative activity of his mind, if uninterrupted by the calls of cheerful human society, obliged him to be 'in a continual burning of thought.' In his lone condition he wrote the sonnet beginning:

O Solitude! if I must with thee dwell,  
Let it not be among the jumbled heap  
Of murky buildings. . . .

To the country-bred boy the Borough must have seemed a noisome desolation. His brothers were not far away, working for Richard Abbey in Pancras Lane, and he had a friend, a 'kindred spirit,' George Felton Mathew; but their companionship was not always at hand. Astley Cooper took an especial interest in Keats and, perhaps seeing that the boy was not happy, recommended him to the care of his dresser and young relation, George Cooper. Keats went to live with Cooper and a friend in rooms over a tallow-chandler's shop in St. Thomas's Street. George Cooper and his friend, Frederick Tyrrell were, however, near the end of their course and soon Keats was sharing lodgings with George Wilson Mackereth and Henry Stephens. Stephens, afterwards a

surgeon of good repute, had literary leanings and wrote a tragedy, *Edwy and Elgiva*. He is known to the modern world as the inventor of a famous ink. In later life he gave his impressions of 'little Keats' in a letter to Lord Houghton, Keats's first biographer:

... His passion ... for poetry was soon manifested. He attended lectures and went through the usual routine but he had no desire to excel in that pursuit ... In a room, he was always at the window, peering into space, so that the window-seat was spoken of by his comrades as Keats's place ... In the lecture room he seemed to sit apart and to be absorbed in something else, as if the subject suggested thoughts to him which were not practically connected with it. He was often in the subject and out of it, in a dreamy way.

He never attached much consequence to his own studies in medicine, and indeed looked upon the medical career as the career by which to live in a workaday world, without being certain that he could keep up the strain of it. He nevertheless had a consciousness of his own powers, and even of his own greatness, though it might never be recognised ... Poetry was to his mind the zenith of all his aspirations: the only thing worth the attention of superior minds: so he thought: all other pursuits were mean and tame ... The greatest men in the world were the poets and to rank among them was the chief object of his ambition. It may readily be imagined that this feeling was accompanied with a good deal of pride and conceit, and that amongst mere medical students he would walk and talk as one of the Gods might be supposed to do when mingling with mortals. This pride exposed him, as may be readily imagined, to occasional ridicule, and some mortification.

Having a taste and liking for poetry myself, though at that time but little cultivated, he regarded me as something a little superior to the rest, and would gratify himself frequently by showing me some lines of his writing, or some new idea which he had struck out. We had frequent conversation on the merits of particular poets, but our tastes did not agree.

Stephens was an adherent to the old order of things, whereas Keats asserted, with the splendid arrogance of youth, that Pope was 'no poet, but a mere versifier.' Apparently both Spenser and Byron were outside the range of young Stephens' sympathies. It is no wonder then that when he showed his first attempts in verse to the young Romantic they were 'condemned.' Poor Stephens adds 'he seemed to think it presumption in me to attempt to tread along the same path-

way as himself at however humble a distance.' The clumsy prose style of his memoir would suggest that Stephens was by nature more suited to invent ink than to employ it. But we have all had misguided ambitions and Keats wounded him.

He had two brothers who visited him frequently, and they worshipped him. They seemed to think their brother John was to be exalted, and to exalt the family name.

This hero-worship must have annoyed the irritated Stephens but he enjoyed a vicarious revenge :

I remember a student from St. Bartholomew's Hospital who came often to see him, as they had formerly been intimate, but though old friends they did not cordially agree. Newmarsh, or Newmarch (I forget which was his name) was a classical scholar, as was Keats, and therefore they scanned freely the respective merits of the Poets of Greece and Rome. Whenever Keats shewed Newmarch any of his poetry it was sure to be ridiculed and severely handled.

Stephens has made a slip here. Keats had no Greek. Newmarch he described as 'a light-hearted and merry fellow' . . . 'rather too fond of mortifying Keats,' and teasing his brothers for their hero-worship.

To his fellow-students Keats never mentioned his origins though it was generally known that he was the son of a livery-stable keeper. As the majority of the students were of the tradesman class his reticence was thought to show an improper pride. This may have been so, but on the other hand Keats was not likely to want to dwell upon early memories. Rawlings may still have been at the Swan and Hoop to remind him of his mother's hasty remarriage.

Stephens says that, instead of taking notes, Keats would scribble doggerel rimes, preferably in another man's notebook. But in this he was apparently doing what nearly every other student did—it was an established jest. We know that he kept at least one set of notes well.

In my syllabus of chemical lectures he scribbled many lines on the paper cover . . . long torn off, except one small piece, on which is the following fragment . . .

Give me women, wine and snuff  
Until I cry out, "hold ! enough,"  
You may do so, sans objection,  
Until the day of resurrection.

. . . He was gentlemanly in his manners and when he condescended to talk upon other subjects he was agreeable and intelligent. He was quick and apt at learning, when he chose to give his attention to any subject. He was a steady quiet and well behaved person, never inclined to pursuits of a low or vicious character.

There is also a prose fragment said to have been scribbled during a lecture, the 'Alexander Fragment,' given in the appendix of Colvin's 'Life,' and in H. Buxton Forman's 1901 edition, together with a description of Keats in a 'deep poetic dream' in the lecture theatre by 'another fellow student.' This student was Walter Cooper Dendy who, as he left St. Thomas's medical school before Keats's arrival at Guy's, was not actually a contemporary. He probably remained in connection with the hospital as a junior demonstrator under Cline, and so would have met Keats. He was the author of a little book *On the Phenomena of Dreams* (1832) and also a work, half-fact, half-fiction, called *The Philosophy of Mystery* in which occur the two passages; the description of Keats with his mind 'on Parnassus with the Muses' and the 'Alexander Fragment.'

Other fellow-students of Keats were Thomas Wakly and John White Webster from Boston, North America; both famous in after years, though one was distinguished and the other notorious. Thomas Wakly was the dauntless founder, proprietor and first editor of *The Lancet*, and John Webster, a professor at Harvard, committed a brutal murder in 1850, an account of which can be read in *Famous Trials*.

On July the 29th, 1816, Keats and Wilson Mackereth went up to Apothecaries' Hall for examination. Keats (examined by Mr. Brande) was 'granted a Certificate to practise as an Apothecary in the Country' (i.e. in the United Kingdom). Wilson Mackereth was failed. The examination was oral and probably not too searching. Albert Smith, writing in 1841, calls it 'the jalap and rhubarb botheration.' Successful examinees were at once informed they had passed and were given a tea by the Worshipful Masters. Knowing Keats's kindness of heart one would like to think that he refused the tea and went home with the crestfallen Mackereth. Keats's name appears in *The London Medical Repository* for the half-year ending December, 1816, in a list of certified Apothecaries. Reproductions of this list, of his two certificates and of the

pages of Guy's Registers on which his name appears are in the Keats Memorial House at Hampstead. On the Apothecaries' Certificate Keats is described as of full age, whereas according to the Baptismal Register he was not<sup>1</sup> twenty-one until October.

After his examination Keats went away to Margate and there he wrote his rimed epistle to George. In it he spoke of the joys of poetry, of dreams of chivalry linked with the living beauty of the sea, of the 'coy Moon' (always his dear love); of 'the living pleasures of the Bard':

But richer, far, Posterity's award . . .  
What, though I leave this dull, and earthly mould  
Yet shall my spirit lofty converse hold  
With after times. . . .

He had already spoken to Cowden Clarke of a feeling of unfitness for medicine. 'The other day,' he said, 'during the lecture, there came a sunbeam into the room, and with it a whole troop of creatures floating in the ray: and I was off with them to Oberon and fairy-land.' And in moments of greater responsibility his imagination seized and mocked him. 'My last operation was the opening of a man's temporal artery. I did it with the utmost nicety, but reflecting on what passed through my mind at the time, my dexterity seemed a miracle, and I never took up the lancet again.'

He wrote in the poetic epistle to George:

Full many a dreary hour have I past,  
My brain bewildered, and my Mind o'ercast  
With Heaviness; in seasons, when I've thought  
No sphere's strains, by me, could e'er be caught  
From the blue Dome. . . .

That I should never hear Apollo's song,  
Though feathery clouds were floating all along  
The purple West, and two bright Streaks between,  
The golden Lyre itself were faintly seen. . . .

He was not yet certain of his high destiny. Later he could write with calm and certainty, 'I think I shall be among the English poets after my death,' but now he was young and his

<sup>1</sup> In this connection Professor H. W. Garrod makes an interesting suggestion with regard to the date of Keats's birth in his new edition of the Poems.

powers were untried. He was unhappy ; torn in two by his poetic ambition and the dictates of his sterling common sense :

Could I, at once, my mad Ambition smother  
Foretasting Joys like these ; sure I should be  
Happier, and dearer to Society.

But Nature and his own ambition were to prevail. To paraphrase Sir George Newman, the medical chapter of his life was ended ; the apothecary became the superb alchemist.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Early Friends*

THE CLOSEST OF KEATS'S FRIENDS WERE HIS TWO BROTHERS. They were both young men of intelligence with similar tastes to his own. George was Keats's complement, sanguine and cheerful where he was pessimistic and moody, more practical than his greater brother who was careless in worldly affairs. Of Tom's character we know little beyond that he too was of a sanguine nature and had 'an exquisite love of life.' There was no one who understood John so well as Tom. All three brothers shared in a love of Shakespeare.

When George and Tom left school they both entered Abbey's tea-warehouse<sup>1</sup> at 4 Pancras Lane. George we know lived at one time over the business and probably both brothers lived in the Abbey household in winter when their guardian, like most City tradesmen, moved in from Walthamstow with his family. They would therefore be for some months of the year with their little sister, Fanny.

Tom did not remain long in the warehouse. He is to us a shadowy figure and we know little of his movements. He was tall, thin and narrow-chested and soon became an invalid. There is a bare record of a visit to Lyons. As Abbey had an interest in a hatter's in the Poultry and Lyons was a centre for hatmaking, Tom may have been sent there to gain some knowledge of the trade. But Tom was not fitted for the battle of life. His illness, combined with the cost of maintaining Keats at Guy's, was a heavy drain on the estate. Money difficulties were early to dog the steps of these unfortunate boys.

On Tom's seventeenth birthday, November the 18th, 1816, John wrote a tender sonnet in which he put his love, the friendship between the brothers, their mutual delight in

<sup>1</sup> Mason's, the oldest tea-shop in the City, now stands on this site.



Shakespeare and a wish, pitiful to the reader, that they may long be together :

Small, busy flames play through the fresh laid coals,  
 And their faint cracklings o'er our silence creep  
 Like whispers of the household gods that keep  
 A gentle empire o'er fraternal souls.  
 And while, for rhymes, I search around the poles,  
 Your eyes are fix't, as in poetic sleep,  
 Upon the lore so voluble and deep,  
 That aye at fall of night our care condoles.  
 This is your birth-day Tom, and I rejoice  
 That thus it passes smoothly, quietly.  
 Many such eves of gently whispering noise  
 May we together pass, and calmly try  
 What are this world's true joys,—ere the great voice,  
 From its fair face, shall bid our spirits fly.

This sonnet was written by Keats in Emma Isola's album. Perhaps it was a favourite of Charles Lamb's.

Keats had for other men an exceptional charm and never needed to exert himself to make friends. Most of the early acquaintances came to him through his brothers. Of his fellow students a Charles Butler was, so far as we know, the only one he cared to visit outside the hospital.

One of his earliest friends was Joseph Severn who was to be so tenderly associated with him in his last days. Through Severn the brothers came to know William Haslam, the true and steady, 'our oak friend.' We know little about him except that in time of need he was unwearied in his kindness.

Joseph Severn is a clear, bright figure. It is to his writings that we owe much of our knowledge of Keats. He was a struggling painter whose ambition, like that of many of the painters of his time, was to cover large canvases with historical scenes. It was perhaps a loss to a charming and intimate art that Severn had this ambition. His miniatures and especially those works of love, the portraits of his friend Keats, are life-like and delicate. His finest piece, a group on ivory of his family painted not long before he went to Italy in 1820, is, in the words of Dr. G. C. Williamson, 'a work of high accomplishment and an important example of skill on the part of an artist who has not always been highly appreciated.'

He was not intellectually well informed and the closest link between him and Keats was 'a mutual love of nature.'

Visual memory was strong in Keats and the faculty of observation had been more highly developed in him by his medical training. He could see a landscape almost with a painter's eye. There was a further bond between the two young men in a mutual love of music of which Severn had a fair knowledge. He played on the pianoforte.

He was two years older than Keats but had for him the worship of a younger man. He speaks of Keats's 'generous bestowal of his mental richness, and the free imparting of his poetical gifts, as well as his taste in the arts, his knowledge of history, and his most fascinating power in the communicating of these.' Keats opened a new world to Severn who was 'raised from the mechanical drudgery' of his art 'to the hope of brighter and more elevated courses.'

He was the eldest son of a music-master who had strongly opposed his son's desire to be a painter on the grounds that there was no money in it. He gave way so far as to make a compromise which he hoped would both satisfy his son and give him a lucrative career. He apprenticed him for seven or eight years to an engraver. But Severn was unhappy and dissatisfied. To the end of his long days (he lived to be 86) he deplored the time wasted and his lack of equipment for his chosen art, painting in oils. He was largely self-taught. He attended art-classes at night and in his leisure, when he was not 'stabbing copper' or walking to and from his father's house in Hoxton, he made small water-colour portraits at ten-and-sixpence in order to buy colours for his painting. Occupied as he was he had little free time to devote to his friends. It was probably not until 1816 or 1817 that he spent more than an occasional hour or so with Keats. By this time he had developed in a small way quite a prosperous business in miniature-painting.

The Keats boys had not long been in the City before they came to know a number of young people who were interested in literature. Keats's particular friend in this group was George Felton Mathew whose father was a mercer in Oxford Street and had a house in the new Regent's Park. In after years he gave to Lord Houghton a pleasant picture of the young poet:

Keats and I though about the same age, and both inclined to literature, were in many respects as different as two individuals

could be. He enjoyed good health—a fine flow of animal spirits—was fond of company—could amuse himself admirably with the frivolities of life—and had great confidence in himself. I on the other hand was languid and melancholy—fond of repose—thoughtful beyond my years—and diffident to the last degree.

Mathew added rather smugly that he ‘always delighted in administering to the happiness of others.’ It pleased him very much to see John and George enjoying themselves at little ‘domestic concerts and dances’; entering into the cheerful life of a large family. Mathew ‘loved the institutions of my country’ and had no sympathy with the ‘sceptical and republican’ views of Keats whom he found to be ‘a fault-finder with everything established.’ He bore with him, however, because his views were sincere and he ‘would often express regret on finding that he had given pain and annoyance by opposing with ridicule or asperity the opinions of others.’ Mathew’s taste in poetry was as conventional as his outlook on life. It is not surprising that on contact with friends of finer mental calibre and more congenial views Keat’s friendship for him cooled.

There was a sister Mary and two cousins, Caroline and Anne Mathew, with whom Keats was friendly. We know little of Mary except that in her album she wrote down some of Keats’s early poems.

Once when Caroline and Anne were on holiday at Hastings he sent them some quaint verses, breathing eighteenth century, deploring that he could not ‘their light, mazy footsteps attend’:

’Tis morn, and the flowers with dew are yet drooping,  
I see you are treading the verge of the sea :  
And now I ah, I see it—you just now are stooping  
To pick up the keep-sake intended for me.

The keepsake which the ‘fair nymphs’ picked up was a beautiful dome-shaped shell and he prizes it :

For, indeed, ’tis a sweet and peculiar pleasure  
(And blissful is he who such happiness finds),  
To possess but a span of the hour of leisure  
In elegant, pure, and aerial minds.

Alas ! These elegant, pure and aerial minds hardened later in a sour evangelical mould. In old age the Mathews felt

their early association with Keats to have been part of a mere juvenile frivolity and they destroyed writings and poems of his. They seem, with their cousin, to have been in these early days young people of the rather morbid sensibility then in fashion. Mathew, himself a writer and poetiser, thought a low trembling voice a suitable vehicle for poetry. He accused Keats of a lack of emotion in reading aloud.

Keats followed up these verses with more of a distinctly inferior quality, 'On Receiving a Curious Shell, and a Copy of Verses, from the same Ladies' and addressed them to Mathew under the pseudonym of 'Eric.' The poem sent was Tom Moore's 'Golden Chain' in the same pretty jingle. Keats's verses end prophetically :

Adieu, valiant Eric ! with joy thou art crown'd ;  
Full many the glories that brighten thy youth,  
I too have my blisses, which richly abound  
In magical powers, to bless and to sooth.

They were in reply to an even more complimentary set addressed to him by Mathew. Jane Austen has said that though poetry is the food of love one good sonnet is enough to starve entirely away 'a slight, thin sort of inclination.' Perhaps a dose of poetry can have the same effect on a failing friendship.

It seems odd that Keats with his strong sense of humour could have been intimate with these young sentimentalists, especially after the society of Cowden Clarke ; but sensibility was the fashion. His liking for Dr. Beattie and Mrs. Tighe, poets in the third or fourth class, was also in period. To us, glancing through dusty volumes of these once fashionable writers, it seems strange that, after swallowing the heady draughts of the robust Elizabethans, he could sip their thin potations with any measure of delight. But genius has strange bedfellows. Often the young poet can learn more from the second-rate because the skeleton of their work is not so well clothed. Experiments in versification, imagery and development are more apparent as the whole is not forged into an ultimate perfection. He can see more clearly how the wheels go round. Both Mrs. Tighe and Beattie abound in the new, natural imagery and make use of what Beattie called the 'Gothic stanza' of Spenser ; the stanza Keats was to employ

so skilfully in 'The Eve of St. Agnes.' He read both poets with the young Mathews and perhaps, both in the case of the poets and the youthful sentimentalists, he refined away the dross in the alembic of his own mind. Having seized the gold he passed on.

There was a girl in this group of young people who was apparently a centre of interest for the young men. Her name was Mary Frogley. She was reputed in later life to have been 'an old flame' of Keats and it is said that many of his early verses were addressed to her. The verses headed 'To \* \* \* \*', beginning 'Had'st thou liv'd in days of old,' in the *Poems*, 1817, were certainly to Mary. These lines were shortened by Keats and sent to her as a valentine by George in 1816. Mathew also addressed verses to her.

Mary Frogley was a pretty girl with dark curly hair and dimples in a 'lively countenance.' Keats admired vivacious women. She took an interest in his work and it is to her and a shadowy friend named Kirkman that we are indebted for the preservation of many of the early verses. She seems in his later career and after his death to have kept up an interest in him. In 1838 we hear of her as Mrs. Neville being in possession of one early and two late sketches of Keats made by Severn. She was a cousin to Richard Woodhouse, the young lawyer who 'boswellised' Keats and his work for the benefit of posterity. If one of Woodhouse's notebooks of Keatsiana had not been destroyed in a fire we might know considerably more about Keats's early life.

There was another girl with whom the Keatses were certainly acquainted in the December of 1816 and perhaps earlier, Georgiana Augusta Wylie, the daughter of James Wylie, Adjutant of the Fifeshire Regiment of Fencible Infantry. She was afterwards to become the wife of George Keats. To her Keats addressed the sonnet beginning :

Nymph of the downward smile and sidelong glance,  
In what diviner moments of the day  
Art thou most lovely ?

She was at this time only fourteen. Keats had for her a strong affection and a high regard. He called her 'disinterested'; a word which he applied to no others but Socrates and Christ. By 'disinterested' he meant something more

positive than unselfish; an ability to stand apart, to work for the common good in a spirit wholly divorced from self. But her detachment did not make Georgiana austere. She was a lively girl with a strong sense of fun. If she had not been taken so early from him (she went with George to America in the summer of 1818) she might have given Keats that sisterly companionship he lacked and helped him to an understanding of women.

During part of August and September Keats was with Tom at Margate. While they were there Tom received the only 'Amena' letter which has come to light. This was one of a series of letters purporting to come from a woman desperately in love with Tom. It was a practical joke perpetrated by Charles Wells. It might at first be considered a stupid schoolboy joke, for Tom was only sixteen and Wells probably even younger, but the letters were kept up until they passed beyond a jest. Wells was a singular character with a streak of cruelty in him and he tormented Tom with these letters when he was not in a state of health to suspect the extravagance of them. He seems to have replied in serious vein. The letter which has come down to us was not the first. It is written closely on four quarto pages and in an unpleasantly erotic strain. If written by Wells himself it shews an extraordinary precocity, but Keats, when he came to know who was responsible for the cruel trick, thought there had been a confederate. The letter must have taken a long time to compose and write, but this was an age in which a man addicted to practical joking would take immense trouble to insure success. The letter may shortly be published.

We do not know whether Keats remained on at the Hospital to complete the customary year. As he was not twenty-one until the 31st of October his guardian might have insisted that he should remain at Guy's. Mr. Abbey had made careful plans for the future career of his eldest ward and it must have been a considerable shock to him when John announced his determination to abandon medicine for poetry.

## CHAPTER V

### *Keats's Personality, his World and an Experience*

RICHARD ABBEY, TEA-BROKER, WAS, ONE MAY GUESS, A commonplace, unimaginative man of the type one may meet by the score to-day in any of the more expensive City restaurants. In appearance he was, according to John Taylor, 'a large stout goodnatured looking man with a great Piece of Benevolence standing out on the Top of his Forehead.' Unless the bump of Benevolence were merely delusive, this description of him would seem to support the view that, in his relations with his wards, he did what he conceived to be his duty, and not unkindly. It was his misfortune that in at least one of his wards he entertained an angel unawares. He was an old-fashioned man who clung to the old ideas. Up to 1827 he was still wearing the dress of his youth, 'white Cotton Stockings & Breeches & half Boots,—when for a long Time there had been no other Man on the Exchange in that Dress, & he was become so conspicuous for it as to be an object of attention in the Streets.' To an elderly man with set ideas the care of four lively young people could not have been an easy one. He must have felt some relief that soon he would be quit of his eldest ward, John, who was now on the eve of his majority and fitted, by the expenditure of more than his share of the family money, for a prosperous career. Little Fanny was in the charge of his wife and the two younger boys under his eye in the counting-house at 4 Pancras Lane.

Partly to spite Hammond at Edmonton, and partly because the late Mrs. Jennings had been known and respected in the district, Abbey had determined that John should start a practice in the nearby village of Tottenham. 'He communicated his Plans to his Ward but his Surprise was not moderate to hear in Reply, that he did not intend to be a Surgeon.'

Taylor's report of Richard Abbey's words dramatises the

encounter between ward and guardian. The fat tradesman, secure in his authority and probably seated comfortably in a familiar armchair, and the vivid, beautiful boy standing before him.

"Not intend to be a Surgeon! Why, what do you mean to be?"

"I mean to rely on my abilities as a poet."

"John, you are either mad, or a fool to talk in so absurd a manner."

"My mind is made up," John said very quietly. He added that he knew he possessed abilities greater than most men, and he meant to get his living by exercising them. 'Abbey called him a Silly Boy, & prophesied a speedy Termination to his inconsiderate Enterprise.'

Knowing Keats's hot temper, it is possible that high words followed. With head thrown back, chin out and lip quivering, the boy would seem to rise in stature and his wine-dark eyes flash. The puffy old Abbey might scoff: he went home to his brothers secure in their approval and proudly conscious of his high destiny. 'I think I shall be among the English poets after my death.'

Although Keats was very short he was of good figure, broad-shouldered and well-proportioned. He had inherited from his father a West Country russet colouring. His bodily appearance, but the mere shell of the protean spirit within, changed considerably, and to each of his friends and in varying but characteristic moods he appeared differently. The familiar portraits by Severn, Brown and Haydon all vary with the particular aspect of himself he was in the habit of turning to these very dissimilar friends. In Severn's likenesses he is all beautiful sensibility; one can almost see the wide mouth quiver. In Brown's drawing he is a strong, intellectual man and in Haydon's portrait a creature of high poetic fire. Similarly, in the descriptions given of him details vary. Cowden Clarke speaks of his eyes as light hazel; Severn adds 'like the hazel eyes of a wild gipsy-maid in colour, set in the face of a young god.' In another place Severn speaks of 'the wine-like lustre of Keats's eyes, just like those of certain birds which habitually front the sun.' Leigh Hunt describes them as 'large, dark and sensitive,' and Mrs. George Keats as 'dark brown.' The colour of his



hair is also variously described. Cowden Clarke says it was lightish brown and Mrs. George Keats a golden red. Leigh Hunt who possessed a lock gave it as brown with reddish or golden lights according to how it was held up to the light. This, so far as we can judge by the lock which has recently come to Keats House, was the true colour. It belonged to the Llanos family (the descendants of Fanny Keats) and has never been exposed to the light. Keats may have had that reddish brown hair which varies in colour with health and gets darker with the years. It was the fashion among the young romantics to wear the hair long and Keats's hair grew gracefully. According to his friend Bailey, 'if you placed your hand upon his head the curls fell round it like a rich plumage.'

His features are known to us by the life mask, though the upper lip was more curled and so shortened in effect: in the mask the weight of the clay would lengthen it. His expression was as mutable as the face of the sea; dimpling with gay life in the light of the sun and strongly sombre under cloud. He had 'a peculiar sweetness of expression' in the company of friends. His face was darkly pathetic in moments of brooding and when lit up by inspiration 'his eye had an inward look, perfectly divine, like a Delphian priestess who saw visions.'

In building up a portrait of Keats we must not forget, as many of his romantic friends did in their descriptions of him, his gaiety and strong sense of humour. This is abundantly clear in his earlier letters which are full of an odd fun inclined to richly ridiculous hyperbole, and sprinkled with occasional verse as cheerful as daisies on a green lawn.

This rare creature, gifted with a sensibility beyond that even of most poets, now stepped out of uncongenial bondage into a freer world; into a feverish, post-war world in which violently opposed forces could be palpably felt. He stood with one foot in the old world and one in the new. Around him were the old narrow City streets and courts, evil-smelling and dark, lit by feeble oil-lamps which served only to make 'darkness visible': but in the West End and in the East beyond the borders of the old crowded City, were new roads and those spacious, bright squares, the beautiful gift to London of late eighteenth-century architecture. Already in West-

minster and Finsbury there were the new-fangled gas-lamps, a rich illumination which had penetrated even into the houses of the more progressive Londoners. Although the old-fashioned cesspool was still noisomely evident there was already a sewer constructed in the Strand. The streets were patrolled by the old and inefficient watchmen but the Bow-street Runners, heralding the modern police, had already been embodied. Although the long-distance services out of London were efficient and swift, the suburban coaches were slow and uncomfortable. The traveller was still not entirely safe from highwaymen. In a guidebook for 1815 the visitor is warned to travel into London from the Surrey side well before sundown in case of attack. The railway engine was already in being. As early as 1808 Robert Trevithick's engine, 'Catch-me-if-you-can,' was running on a circular track near Euston giving 'joy-rides' for a shilling a head at a speed of eighteen miles an hour. On the sea tall-masted ships made long, uncertain and uncomfortable journeys, sped by the winds as they blew, but the jolting mechanical 'Margate Hoy' was already on the Thames, portent of the conqueror, steam.

A new humanitarian spirit was abroad but still animals were callously treated; badgers, bulls and bears were baited for man's amusement. Men and women were hanged and transported for theft, put in the pillory or flogged. A few gibbets, with their hideous, blackened, white-ribbed burdens, still clanked and swung on the public roads. Although there was agitation among the Evangelicals for the abolition of slavery, little children under six toiled all day long in the stifling cotton mills. It was thought a good thing by many that the poor should be thus early introduced to habits of industry. The Prince Regent and an aristocracy grown rich and powerful in land during the wars spent lavishly on building, on mistresses, gambling, heavy eating and hard drinking: the middle classes were in many areas sinking into dire poverty and the poor were destitute. There were demands from thinking men for drastic reform in Parliamentary election and in government and the widespread misery of the people led to riots and attacks on property. The Tory Government, bolstered up by land, wealth and the prevalence of rotten boroughs, in no way represented

the country and was out of touch with new movements and modern thought.

Agriculture was still the staple industry of Great Britain but the new machines in the North were already imprisoning human beings in smoky, crowded cities and throwing the handworkers out of employment. Bad harvests and the aftermath of the ancient evil of war were pauperising the small farmer and his labourer. Starvation walked gaunt and rattling through the land. The Government's reply to agricultural distress was the passing of the stupid and drastic Corn Laws. When the hungry men of the North demonstrated with violence, and rioted in desperation, it passed the oppressive Six Acts, taking away liberty of thought and action. The panacea for widespread misery was the raising of a few private subscriptions: public relief was left to financially crippled local government.

We know that the burden of this misery was a heavy one to the young Liberals, roused by the weekly fulminations of Hunt's *Examiner* and of *The Political Register* published by that stout and fearless old yeoman, William Cobbett, but there must have been much that we look back upon with shame which they, children of their generation, accepted as a part of the order of things. We know, and the knowledge gives us a distinct shock, that Keats in boyhood was present at a bear-baiting which he afterwards described for Cowden Clarke with vivacity. He imitated the antics of the bear and made his old usher laugh. 'His perception of humour,' said Clarke, 'was both vivid and irresistibly amusing.' But human injustice always aroused in him a swift anger. 'The form of his visage was changed' and drawing himself up so that he appeared to grow immensely in stature he would shout: "Why is there not a human dustbin in which to tumble such fellows?" He was to write later: 'Health and Spirits can only belong unalloyed to the selfish Man—the Man who thinks much of his fellows can never be in Spirits.'

In the autumn of 1816 Keats was, so far as we know, living with his brothers, probably at first in the Poultry and later certainly at 76 Cheapside in rooms over the archway leading into Bird-in-hand Court and the Queen's Arms Tavern (now Simpson's). Here Severn made the drawing of him given as the frontispiece of this book. In the Scottish

National Portrait Gallery, forming part of the Watson collection, there is a version of this drawing on the mount of which is gummed a slip of paper bearing these lines :

Mens thoughts have sure been winged they have found  
 An inspiration in a pleasant sound  
 Or pleasant sight and we have heard there for  
 Most dainty Tales from many Bards of yore.

They are in Keats's own handwriting and would appear to be some early unpublished verse of his.

He developed rapidly. Most of what he wrote was not in the first rank of his poetry but it was crammed with the luxuriant fancy of a young genius and grew steadily in power, culminating in October in the 'Chapman's Homer' sonnet, acknowledged to be one of the greatest in our language.

The story of the poem is among the most interesting in the annals of English literature. Cowden Clarke tells us that now he and Keats were living not far apart again they had resumed their old habit of meeting to read and talk about books. The Elizabethans, their darlings, were hard to come by in those days; there were few reprints and when a Mr. Alsager lent Clarke Chapman's translation of Homer in the folio edition of 1616 they hung over it till daybreak. It was, says Clarke, 'a memorable night . . . in my life's career . . . to work we went, turning to some of the "famousest" passages, as we had scrappily known them in Pope's version. . . . One scene I could not fail to introduce him to—the shipwreck of Ulysses . . . and I had the reward of one of his delightful stares upon reading the following lines :

Then forth he came, his both knees faltring ; both  
 His strong hands hanging downe ; and all in froth  
 His cheeks and nostrils flowing. Voice and breath  
 Spent all to vse ; and downe he sunke to Death.  
*The sea had soakt his heart through* : all his vaines  
 His toiles had rackt, t'a labouring woman's paines.  
 Dead weary was he.'

'The sea had soakt his heart through.' The magnificent conception, the direct expression must delight the common reader and how much more the poet. Here was the antique world, which Keats had only known till now through

mythologies, a few Latin authors, Fénelon and polite eighteenth-century translations, echoing down to him through the voice of old Chapman roaring through the polter's measure. Clarke later drew Keats's attention to Pope's rendering of that line. It must have been pleasant to hear his shout of laughter :

From mouth to nose the briney torrent ran,  
And *lost in lassitude lay all the man.*

To Keats the rough letters of this old book were 'spiritual hieroglyphics': he read, though he knew it not, the stuff of life, of his own poetic life. This robust verse, opening up a vista into a world so old and yet living, wrought a miracle in his brain. Much that was before unrelated, cohered; within a few months he could state in 'Sleep and Poetry' his creed, that orderly progression of poetic growth to which he adhered steadily throughout his short life. In *Studies in Keats* Mr. Middleton Murry has a masterly analysis of the evidence which goes to show that this reading in old Chapman was momentous and the sonnet which sprang from it, a landmark.

When at length Keats tore himself away he walked in the rising of the late October sun back to the City. Through the short two miles he was composing at fever heat. By ten o'clock that morning there was on Clarke's breakfast table a letter. He must have wondered to see his friend's handwriting when they had parted so soon before. Wonder mounted into high amazement when he broke the seal and found within 'On first Looking into Chapman's Homer.' It was not in the final version; 'eagle eyes' was not there and 'Yet did I never breathe its pure serene' had in its place a poorer, though more self-revelatory line. This is probably how the poem stood as Cowden Clarke read it :

Much have I travell'd in the Realms of Gold,  
And many goodly States and Kingdoms seen ;  
Round many Western Islands have I been,  
Which Bards in fealty to Apollo hold.  
Of one wide expanse had I been told,  
Which deep brow'd Homer ruled as his Demesne :  
Yet never could I tell what men could mean,  
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud, and bold.

Then felt I like some Watcher of the Skies  
When a new Planet swims into his Ken,  
Or like stout Cortez, when with wond'ring eyes  
He star'd at the Pacific, and all his Men  
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—  
Silent upon a Peak in Darien.

## CHAPTER VI

### *Haydon and the Elgin Marbles ; Leigh Hunt (October, 1816-January, 1817)*

CHARLES COWDEN CLARKE HAD FOSTERED THE EARLY poetic growth of his pupil and it was appropriately he who first drew him into the liberal and artistic circle, prominent members of which were Leigh Hunt, poet, graceful prose-writer and editor of the rebel journal, *The Examiner*, and Haydon the painter.

Some time in 1816 Cowden Clarke, in a glow of anticipation, took to Leigh Hunt some of the young Keats's poems. Knowing that there was merit in them he anticipated some measure of praise but, he said, 'my partial spirit was not prepared for the unhesitating and prompt admiration which broke forth before he had read twenty lines of the first poem.' Hunt himself wrote: 'I shall never forget the impression made upon me by the exuberant specimens of genuine though young poetry that were laid before me.'

The praise of a man recognised by the younger generation as one of its most sensitive and discriminating critics was gratifying enough but, to Cowden Clarke's delight, it was endorsed by the harder-headed Horace Smith, wit and man of letters, who happened to be present. Among the poems was a sonnet written on the day Hunt left prison (February 3rd, 1815) beginning: 'How many bards gild the lapses of time.' Hunt read the sonnet aloud and in reference to the thirteenth line, 'That distance of recognisance bereaves,' Smith exclaimed: "What a well-condensed expression for a youth so young!"

On May 5th Hunt had published in the *Examiner* the first poem of Keats's to be printed, the sonnet, 'O Solitude! if I must with thee dwell.' This, he stated, had been published 'without knowing more of him than any other any-

mous correspondent'; it would therefore appear that it was after this date that Cowden Clarke took the sheaf of poems to him. The evidence as to when Keats first met Hunt is conflicting. Mr. Blunden considers that it was not until December 1st, 1816.

If we accept Mr. Blunden's date for the first meeting with Hunt we must conclude that Keats had already made the acquaintance of Haydon, although Haydon himself said he met Keats at Hunt's house. However, on the last day of October, 1816, Keats wrote to Cowden Clarke :

My daintie Davie,

I will be as punctual as the Bee to the Clover. Very glad am I at the thoughts of seeing so soon this glorious Haydon and all his creation. . . .

Perhaps, therefore, it was Cowden Clarke who first took Keats to the studio at 41 Great Marlborough Street, that small room blocked on one side by an enormous canvas on which Haydon had already been working more than a year. It was his 'Christ's Entry into Jerusalem,' a picture that, in Haydon's own vapourish imagination, was to lift British art to the heights of the Old Masters. On this picture he worked for seven years. Art to him was apparently great in proportion to its size, and although he knew that large canvases could not easily find a place in the homes of his patrons, he persisted in painting larger and larger. He was an extraordinary man with the mind of a genius, with the capacity of genius for hard, unremitting toil, but without the skill of a born painter, or the eyesight to put his ideas accurately into execution. His tragedy was that in his headstrong youth he had seized hold of the wrong tool; the brush instead of the pen. He was a born writer, and his *Autobiography and Memoirs* is one of the most vivid and entertaining books in our language. In self-revelation he comes near to Rousseau and, like the French egoist, although a shrewd observer, he saw the world largely as an appanage to himself. He, the great artist, the heaven-born genius with the brush, had a right to be supported while he achieved his mighty work; even to the extent of borrowing money from impecunious friends. It was less degrading to borrow than to prostitute his divine art by painting



portraits or saleable pictures. Here is an extract from his diary :

*April 29th (1815).* This week has really been a week of great delight. Never have I had such irresistible and perpetual urgings of future greatness. I have been like a man with air-balloons under his armpits, and ether in his soul. While I was painting, walking, or thinking, beaming flashes of energy followed and impressed me. O God! grant they may not be presumptuous feelings. Grant they may be the fiery anticipations of a great soul born to realise them. They came over me, and shot across me, and shook me, till I lifted up my heart and thanked God.

Haydon was constantly thanking God, or exhorting God to support him against his enemies and his creditors. He felt himself to be under the divine protection but was constantly reminding Him of His duty.

To us, looking back, Haydon is both a tragic and a gloriously comic figure but in his own age the great and abounding personality of the man, his exalted power of mind impressed a wide circle of friends so strongly that they too, sometimes against the evidence of their own eyes, believed him to be a genius in painting. To the average man, also, his choice of religious subjects was impressive. His self-enthusiasm, his energy and the size of his canvasses not only hypnotised his friends into lending him money, but even influenced Coutts, the banker, to advance a large sum. The rent he owed to an admiring landlord ran into hundreds and once he dazzled his wine-merchant into making him a present of a dozen bottles.

If this man, strong-willed, bull-necked and abounding in physical energy, could charm the minds of sober, middle-aged folk, what was his effect on that young, untried enthusiast, John Keats? After an evening spent with Haydon (probably this first exciting occasion) he wrote :

My dear Sir—

Last Evening wrought me up, and I cannot forbear sending you the following—

Yours unfeignedly  
John Keats.

He enclosed the sonnet, with its grave and beautiful movement, 'Great Spirits now on earth are sojourning.'

With characteristic precipitation Haydon answered immediately. He was enthusiastic about the sonnet and told Keats he would like to send it to his friend Wordsworth. Keats, like all the young men of his time, looked with admiration towards the North, up to that craggy landmark of the new poetry and he wrote to Haydon the next day, enclosing a carefully written copy of the sonnet :

Your Letter has filld me with a proud pleasure and shall be kept by me as a stimulus to exertion—I begin to fix my eye on one horizon. . . . The Idea of your sending it to Wordsworth put me out of breath—you know with what Reverence I would send my Wellwishes to him—

He was soon a frequent visitor to the studio. Often he sat quietly watching the painter at work, but sometimes Haydon would talk; glorious, half-mad, inspired talk, strengthening the young poet in a faith in his own genius, or uttering violent but often sound criticism on art and literature. It was probably he who started Keats off on that voyage of discovery which ended in the bourn, tranquil and sublime, of the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' with its triumphant ending :

Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty.—That is all  
Ye know on Earth, and all ye need to know.

for we read in Haydon's journal, under the date January 1st, 1813 (over three years before he met Keats) :

You say "After all beauty is the thing." No, it is not; intellect, the feelings of the heart are the chief things. The more beautiful the garb expression is dressed in the better, but you may dress expression so beautifully as to overwhelm it.

Beauty of form is but the vehicle of conveying ideas, but truth of conveyance is the chief object . . . beauty is but a means. . . . Perfect beauty can only belong to beings not agitated by passion, such as angels.

With the pregnant mythology of Ancient Greece Keats was already familiar, but it was reserved for Haydon, in practical illustration of the theory suggested above, to introduce him to a solid reality, a more tangible evidence of that old and abiding power; the Elgin Marbles. Haydon had

made himself their champion and, after long and bitter warfare with the Academy and the Government, he secured recognition of their authentic beauty, and saw them housed in the British Museum. To Keats they were a superb revelation. Their influence on him, in fixing his æsthetic aim and strengthening his determination, is perhaps incalculable. They stimulated him to write two sonnets, one of which was addressed to Haydon. The sonnets are not among his best, but the second, 'On seeing the Elgin Marbles,' is of strong autobiographical interest, and has at least a magnificent conclusion :

My spirit is too weak—mortality  
 Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,  
 And each imagin'd pinnacle and steep  
 Of godlike hardship, tells me I must die  
 Like a sick Eagle looking at the sky.  
 Yet 'tis a gentle luxury to weep  
 That I have not the cloudy winds to keep,  
 Fresh for the opening of the morning's eye.  
 Such dim-conceived glories of the brain  
 Bring round the heart an undescribable feud ;  
 So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,  
 That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude  
 Wasting of old Time—with a billowy main—  
 A sun—a shadow of a magnitude.

To most artists these great fragments are overwhelming in their dazzling light and power and for some they are a draught too potent. In the first vision Keats felt the weight of their very perfection too heavy for him. Afterwards he spent many hours with them, sometimes in the company of Severn but more often alone. Once his friend came upon him in rapt contemplation before them, his face glowing with inward vision. Respecting this happy absorption Severn went quietly away. Another time when Keats was alone there a foppish acquaintance joined him and viewed the marbles condescendingly through a quizzing-glass. After teasing the poet for some time with vapid remarks he left him with the words: "Yes, I believe, Mr. Keats, we may admire these works safely."

Haydon's picture, now at the Mt. St. Mary's Seminary, Norwood, Ohio, shews Christ riding on the ass and closely

surrounded by a throng of people. In imitation of the Old Masters he put in figures of modern historical personages and also of living men. Voltaire was at this time the hero of the Liberal free-thinkers and the devil of the orthodox. He was put in as a smiling scoffer; Newton as a believer; Hazlitt as a detached observer; Wordsworth with bowed head as a devout man; and Keats, a bright amazed face in the background. For this purpose Haydon took casts and it is to that fortunate accident we owe the life-mask, copies of which are at the Keats Memorial House and in the National Portrait Gallery.

Through Severn and Haydon Keats was introduced to many painters, among them David Wilkie, William Hilton and Peter de Wint, the great water-colourist. Among Haydon's pupils were William Bewick, the Landseers, George Lance and William Mayor.

Haydon's friend, James Henry Leigh Hunt, was a man of forty-two. He was an idealist after a different fashion and perhaps in a lesser degree. Thrown into the arena of dusty polemics at an early age, through relationship to a sterner brother, John Hunt, his character had been strengthened by the combat; but his sufferings in mind and in pocket through heavy fines and imprisonment had driven him, paradoxically, further from reality than his vivid nature warranted. He had made his prison in Horsemonger Lane a bower, lined with a rosy trellised wallpaper, and the little courtyard allotted to him for exercise into a flower garden. Public indignation and the resolution (and probably purses) of friends had exacted these privileges from a turnkey already under the influence of Hunt's personal charm. Here he had studied the fifty volumes of the *Parnaso Italiano* and perhaps his finest literary work was his graceful translation into verse of Italian poets unknown to nineteenth-century England. In this, and in the direction of the attention of other writers to the Italians, he rendered service to the cause of literature but the study accentuated in himself a flowery, exotic quality not suited to our harsher northern tongue. The artificially created bower had become his refuge in prison and now he was to find (although he still continued, though less violently, to wage warfare on both political and literary tyranny) a refuge in 'leafy luxury,' in poetical unrealities, in classical

and romantic book-dreams. His son, Thornton, wrote of him :

. . . his *indoles*—which we imperfectly call taste, genius, or natural bent, led him to the lighter ‘humanities.’ A devoted idealist he actually lived in the world of poetry painting and music ; coming into the real world only to play his part, confessedly with very elementary knowledge, in the stern, unprofitable business of constitutional politics ; and mingling in the business of common life only to treat his affairs on bookish principles and to invest his personal friends with ideal attributes. . . . He seldom viewed anything as it really was, but as it looked under the atmosphere of poetry, by the light of classic illustrations.

It was his misfortune that he had to scramble for money and too often feel the want of it when, in Hazlitt’s words, he ‘ought to have been a gentleman born, and to have patronised men of letters. He might then have played, and sung and laughed and talked his life away ; have written manly prose, elegant verse ; and his *Story of Rimini* would have been praised by Mr. Blackwood.’

In person he was handsome, dark and vivid, with the exotic flavour of Creole descent. He made graceful verses and wrote lively prose : he savoured life in an elegant way and his mind had a delicate ‘vinous quality.’ He talked amusingly on many subjects, he criticised acutely and he was that rarity, a good listener. He would discuss orthodox religion, which he repudiated, with that earnest soul, Haydon. When argument became too fierce for his liking he would turn gracefully away to his pianoforte and, in a charming tenor, break into an Italian aria. Mrs. Carlyle dubbed him ‘the talking nightingale ;’ he had something of the apparent inconsequence of a lightly flitting bird.

This charming man lived poetically in the Vale of Health in Hampstead, surrounded by a wife, Marianne, as unpractical and with a taste for modelling, a sister-in-law, Bessy Kent, a keen botanist, and several lively, dark-eyed young children. Carlyle, knowing him in later days in Cheyne Walk, when times were harder, his wife more slatternly and debased by secret drinking, and the children more numerous, called his household a ‘poetical Tinkerdome’ . . . ‘yet the noble Hunt received you in his Tinkerdome in the spirit of a King.’



JOSEPH SEVERN

From a self-portrait in the possession of M. Buxton Forman, Esq.



On December 1st, 1816, Hunt published in *The Examiner* an unsigned article, 'Young Poets.' It began with some remarks on the rise of the new school of poetry, pointing out that it was incorrect to call it new, for it looked back to 'the finer times of the "English Muse . . . its only object being to restore the same love of nature, and of *thinking* instead of mere *talking*, which formerly rendered us real poets, and not mere versifying wits, and bead-rollers of couplets.' The object of his article, he said, was 'merely to notice three young writers, who appear to us to promise a considerable addition of strength to the new school.'

The three writers were Keats, Shelley and John Hamilton Reynolds. Reynolds had recently published his *Naiad*, showing a promise he was not to fulfil. Hunt was not alone in expecting great things of him; Hazlitt in his lecture on 'The Living Poets,' given at the Surrey Institution in 1818, gave Reynolds's sonnet on Sherwood Forest the honour of quotation.

Hunt did not enlarge upon Shelley's work as he had none of his poems beside him. He called him 'a striking and original thinker.' Quoting from the *Naiad*, he criticised Reynolds for a certain artificiality and for too much detail. He continued :

The last of these young aspirants whom we have met with, and who promise to help the new school to revive Nature and

"To put a spirit of youth in everything,"

is, we believe, the youngest of them all, and just of age. His name is John Keats. He has not yet published anything except in a newspaper; but a set of his manuscripts was handed to us the other day, and fairly surprised us with the truth of their ambition, and ardent grappling with Nature. In the following Sonnet there is one incorrect rhyme, which might be easily altered, but which shall serve in the mean time as a peace-offering to the rhyming critics. The rest of the composition, with the exception of a little vagueness in calling the regions of poetry "the realms of gold," we do not hesitate to pronounce excellent, especially the last six lines. The word *swims* is complete; and the whole conclusion is equally powerful and quiet :

He then quoted 'On first Looking into Chapman's Homer.' The incorrect rime was, of course, the 'mean' and 'demesne' of the first version. Keats took this criticism to



heart and altered the line to 'Yet could I never breathe its pure serene.' 'Pure serene' he might have got from Cary's translation of the *Divine Comedy* though there is no evidence that he had yet seen it. Compounds of this type are common enough in eighteenth-century verse; 'pure serene' occurs more than once. Coleridge used it in his second version<sup>1</sup> of 'Hymn before Sunrise' and Thomson in 'To the Memory of the Right Honourable the Lord Talbot.'

On the Sunday the article appeared Keats went up to Hampstead with Cowden Clarke. This praise of him, his first public recognition as a poet, was enough to exalt the young man without the anticipation of meeting with the valiant editor of *The Examiner* and author of *The Story of Rimini*. Cowden Clarke records the pilgrimage:

The character and expression of Keats's features would arrest even the casual passenger in the street; but now they were wrought to a tone of animation that I could not but watch with interest, knowing what was in store for him. . . . As he approached the Heath, there was a rising and accelerated step, with a gradual subsidence of all talk.

The little houses in the Vale of Health nestle cosily in a hollow and the cottage was a fit dwelling for the romantic, tuneful Hunt. In prison he had thought yearningly of 'dear Hampstead': now he had realised his dream of living there in a pretty white house, styled a cottage in the fashionable spirit of urban rusticity.

It was a poet's house who keeps the keys  
Of pleasure's temple.

We can imagine Hunt, his large dark eyes bright with anticipation, awaiting the two young men in that poet's bower, in which

Round about were hung  
The glorious features of the bards who sung  
In other ages—cold and sacred busts  
Smiled at each other.

There were warm and mannered pictures of the domesticated nymphs and satyrs of the elegant century, and a touch of the heroic in images of 'great Alfred'

<sup>1</sup> *The Friend*, October, 1809—reprinted in collected form, 1812, in London.

. . . with anxious pitying eyes,  
 As if he always listened to the sighs  
 Of the goaded world ; and Kosciusko's worn  
 By horrid suffrance—mightily forlorn.

There was the beloved pianoforte at which Hunt would sit and play lightly, singing Italian airs in a voice of remarkable range and sweetness. It should have been summer when Keats first came here so that Hunt might be poetically embowered in blossoms ; but the flowers and foliage were there symbolically.

The delight in the meeting was mutual. Clarke's rosy face beamed with pleasure. 'The interview, which stretched into "three morning-calls," was the prelude to many after-scenes and saunterings about Caen Wood and its neighbourhood ; for Keats was suddenly made a familiar of the household, and was always welcomed.'

It was Hunt's custom to commemorate an occasion in a sonnet. The same day he wrote one to Keats which I give in full because it is not well-known and is so characteristic of the man :

'Tis well you think me truly one of those  
 Whose sense discerns the loveliness of things ;  
 For surely as I feel the bird that sings  
 Behind the leaves, or dawn as it up grows,  
 Or the rich bee rejoicing as he goes,  
 Or the glad issue of emerging springs,  
 Or overhead the glide of a dove's wings,  
 Or turf, or trees, or midst of all, repose :

And surely as I feel things lovelier still,  
 The human look, and the harmonious form  
 Containing woman, and the smile in ill,  
 And such a heart as Charles's, wise and warm,—  
 As surely as all this, I see, ev'n now,  
 Young Keats, a flowering laurel on your brow.

Though not in the first rank of poetry there is a warmth in these lines and a quiet beauty. 'The harmonious form containing woman' is a nasty drop and characteristic. Keats's early work has similar commonplace lines and a luxuriousness common to Hunt but we cannot lay the blame at the elder poet's door. An over-lushness of expression was inevitable in the young poetry of a man so acutely sensuous.

The dropping into flat commonplace, a prominent weakness of Wordsworth's poetry, was inevitable perhaps in early romantic work because of the studied avoidance of the conventional language of verse. There are also, as Sir Sidney Colvin pointed out, examples of 'chatty' lines among the Elizabethans, the staple reading of the romantics; we find them even in the august Milton's early work. He compared Keats's

The silence when some rhymes are coming out;  
And when they're come, a very pleasant rout;

with Milton, in the 'Vacation Exercise':

I have some lively thoughts that rove about,  
And loudly knock to have their passage out.

But though Hunt wrote many graceful lines and some fine ones, and on one occasion a sonnet superior to those produced by Keats and Shelley, he never cured himself of occasional banality. In *The Story of Rimini*, at an emotional point in the story, he perpetrated what is, perhaps, the worst couplet in the language:

The two divinest things this world has got,<sup>1</sup>  
A lovely woman in a rural spot.

which, wickedly and deliciously, Patmore parodied as:

The two divinest things this world can grab,  
A handsome woman in a handsome cab.

Keats was soon to refine away the dross in his own work. In the 1820 volume there is only one example of the 'cheap' line and this, to be fair to Hunt, is almost as dreadful as his couplet:

Of the sweets of Faeries, Peris, Goddesses,  
*There is not such a treat among them all,*  
Haunters of cavern, lake and waterfall,  
As a real woman. . . .

though in defence of Keats it must be borne in mind that, although 'treat' was used colloquially as early as 1808, it had not so strong a slang connotation as it has to-day.

On December 30th the three friends were together again.

<sup>1</sup> Deleted by Hunt in later versions.

They were talking of crickets, 'the cheerful little grasshopper of the fireside,' and Hunt challenged Keats to a poetical contest. They were each to write in a given time a sonnet 'On the Grasshopper and Cricket.' Perhaps there leapt into Keats's mind a memory of Hospital days<sup>1</sup> when, sitting on lonely evening vigil as a dresser on duty, a chirping cricket reminded him in those dismal surroundings of the open countryside. If Keats made this mental connection it is probable he did not mention it. He disliked talking of his medical years.

Cowden Clarke sat by on the sofa while the poets 'set to.' 'I cannot,' he says, 'say how long the trial lasted. . . . The time, however, was short for such a performance, and Keats won as to time.' That the younger man won also as to merit Hunt immediately and generously acknowledged when they exchanged manuscripts. On the way home, however, Keats told Cowden Clarke that he preferred Hunt's poem. Hunt's sonnet is a tinkling performance but pretty enough. He invokes the cricket as

. . . you, warm little housekeeper, who class  
With those who think the candles come too soon,  
-Loving the fire, and with your tricksome tune  
Nick the glad silent moments as they pass ;

The young Keats's poem is a miracle of improvisation :

The poetry of earth is never dead :  
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,  
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run  
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead ;  
That is the Grasshopper's—he takes the lead  
In summer luxury,—he has never done  
With his delights ; for when tired out with fun  
He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.  
The poetry of earth is ceasing never :  
On a lone winter evening, when the frost  
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills  
The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,  
And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,  
The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mr. F. N. Doubleday of Guy's informs me that the crickets still chirp on the ancient hearths of the surgical wards.

<sup>2</sup> The sonnets were printed together in the *Examiner*, September 21st, 1817, and in the *Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature* (the Unitarian organ) in October, 1817.

It is a typically romantic poem. Could any classic writer have spoken of 'the poetry of earth'? The flexibility of the sonnet is also typically romantic. Although it is constructed on a rigid rime scheme, the rimes are not insistent to the ear and the lines flow into one another. In it nature and poetry are at one; poetry coming from him, as he wished it should come, 'as naturally as the leaves of a tree.'

Keats, a man of deep affections and naturally domestic, had not known a real home for years. It was a quiet joy to be made one of this happy household rendered felicitous by the witchery of an enchanting man who in his person embodied, somewhat self-consciously it is true, the new romantic spirit. He would stay very late in sweet converse. On one of his solitary walks through the night back to Cheapside he composed :

Keen, fitful gusts are whisp'ring here and there  
 Among the bushes half leafless, and dry ;  
 The stars look very cold about the sky,  
 And I have many miles on foot to fare.  
 Yet feel I little of the cool bleak air,  
 Or of the dead leaves rustling drearily,  
 Or of those silver lamps that burn on high,  
 Or of the distance from home's pleasant lair :  
 For I am brimfull of the friendliness  
 That in a little cottage I have found ;  
 Of fair-hair'd Milton's eloquent distress,  
 And all his love for gentle Lycid drown'd ;  
 Of lovely Laura in her light green dress,  
 And faithful Petrarch gloriously crown'd.

Sometimes Keats would stay the night, spending it on an impromptu bed in the sitting-room and once, excited by his surroundings and the spirit of his poetical host, he could not get to sleep. His brain clarified, as it had done during that walk back from Clerkenwell in October. There came to him a clear consciousness of his poetic creed and the gradual approach to attainment he had mapped out for himself. He had a vision of a flying charioteer; the god of high poesy. He lay awake all night, or thought he did (the sleep of youth is as natural as breathing, and can be as unaware) but he was happy in living poetry,

. . . so that the morning light  
Surprised me even from a sleepless night ;  
And up I rose refresh'd, and glad, and gay,  
Resolving to begin that very day  
These lines ; . . .

The lines were ' Sleep and Poetry,' that momentous utterance which not only defined Keats's own poetic aim, but in one passage roared defiance of the old school of poetry. It is the last poem in that unequal, but exciting book, the 1817 volume.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Shelley and the 1817 Volume*

IN 1819 KEATS WROTE IN ONE OF HIS JOURNAL LETTERS to George and Georgiana in America :

A Man's life of any worth is a continual allegory—and very few eyes can see the Mystery of his life—a life like the scriptures, figurative. . . . Lord Byron cuts a figure—but he is not figurative—Shakspeare led a life of Allegory ; his works are the comments on it—

The exact meaning of this passage is hard to comprehend, but its application to Keats's own life is not difficult ; endowed as we are with the rich collection of his letters in addition to his poems, we can see the pattern, the shape of his life more clearly than in the case of most writers. The shape suggests an emblem, an allegory, and the beginning and the end of his poetic life is arched over by a misty rainbow ; by a rare and beautiful emanation, by that other young poet, Shelley.

Keats met Shelley at Hunt's house in the February of 1817, though he may have been introduced to him when Shelley first visited Hunt in December, 1816. The two poets had already been associated by Hunt on paper in that first public recognition of them in *The Examiner* of December 1st. Shelley took a strong liking for Keats but Keats did not return it in anything like the same degree. Sensitive as he was to outside influences and to personalities, the positive force of Shelley's ardent mind must have impinged strongly on his. Genius is not perhaps often profoundly influenced by contemporary genius : the mutual stimulation of the young Coleridge and Wordsworth is possibly a notable exception. The creative mind has to work out its own salvation ; another creative mind as strong and of a different texture can more

easily interfere with the natural course than guide it. Great men often learn more readily from lesser, from men of pure intellect rather than from the formative spirit of another genius. The creative spirit, fluid as it is, needs harder, more concrete minds to rub against, from which to acquire strength. The minds of Keats and Shelley were poles apart: Keats, when he came to control his imagination, felt he had changed, contrary to the process of nature, from a butterfly into a chrysalis 'having two little loopholes, whence I may look out into the stage of the world. . . .' He had moulted, 'not for fresh feathers and wings: they are gone, and in their stead I hope to have a pair of patient sublunary legs.' He wrote later to Shelley, saying that an artist must have 'self-concentration—selfishness, perhaps.' . . . 'The thought of such discipline must fall like cold chains upon you, who perhaps never sat with your wings furled for six months together.' Keats, with his intuitive knowledge of character, has suggested the difference between himself and Shelley. He was, and always would have been, true flesh-and-blood with his feet firmly fixed on the ground however high his head might rise into the clouds, whereas Shelley was ethereal, soaring like a butterfly or bird above mankind; seeing much, wise in his own way, but seeing from his own individual skyey angle. Shelley lived more among men; against men, bruising the delicate fabric of his being in violent contacts with their stupidities, their brutalities, but Keats, living among them, was like his master Shakespeare, a man apart, above mankind, and yet in them. He had more dramatic power than Shelley; that power which enables a man to feel himself another. Shelley was more strongly a lyric genius. It is not for his writings of a political trend that we value him to-day, but for those lyrics so delicately lovely that even to read them aloud seems to bruise their fairness.

On the side of mere intellect the two differed profoundly. Keats felt strongly the evils of his day but he realised the inherent imperfections of mankind and knew that no 'Godwin-perfectability' panaceas could reform: he was the more modern man in outlook. Shelley had the late eighteenth century notions firmly in his head, and at this period he talked long and loud about them in his harsh, shrill voice. He says himself that he loved argument and argued with everyone



he met. This would have tired Keats. He talked too a good deal about his poetry, and writers are seldom interested in each other's work. Haydon says that Shelley was 'always sophisticating about his verses: Keats sophisticated about nothing.' Also, and this is always important in human intercourse, Keats had a strong sense of humour and Shelley but an odd sense of fun. A sense of humour enables a man to see in truer proportions. A reformer, necessarily a fanatic, rarely has this sense of proportion. Keats, young as he was, would realise how impotent an unknown writer would be against the established forces of tradition, money and natural reaction from the violence of the French Revolution: Shelley, in the blindness of his enthusiasm threw away with both hands, by the dissemination of his ideas in fugitive pamphlets and in immature verse, his reserve of strength to serve mankind.

Haydon, that curious warped soul, although he expressed loudly his devotion to Keats, maligned him to posterity, and his statement that Keats's reserve with Shelley was the outcome of class-antagonism must be taken with a grain of salt. The reactionary Government was in the hands of powerful aristocratic Tories: Keats probably shared with Leigh Hunt a suspicion of lords, and may have had at this early date a slight but very natural feeling of ill-ease in the company of 'his betters.' It is, however, unlikely that he could feel any degree of patronage in the manners of the democratic Shelley, who had already married the daughter of a retired coffee-house keeper and was now living with the illegitimate daughter of the then notorious Mary Wollstonecraft. It is possible that Keats, who, after all, was very young, may have felt a subconscious jealousy of Shelley in relation to Leigh Hunt, who instantly adored the new planet which had rushed into his orbit and felt strongly the influence of Shelley to the end of his days.

However, remote as Keats might feel himself from the strange, excitable young genius, Shelley was to be bound up with him inevitably in the minds of posterity. When Keats died in Italy (the alien land in which Shelley was then living) he wrote one of his finest poems in elegaic lament over that untimely end. And in that remarkable last stanza of 'Adonais' he foreshadowed his own death:

. . . my spirit's bark is driven,  
 Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng  
 Whose sails were never to the tempest given;  
 The massy earth and spherèd skies are riven!  
 I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar;  
 Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,  
 The soul of Adonais, like a star,  
 Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.

When his shipwrecked body was cast up on the shore a copy of Keats's last volume of poems was in his pocket, doubled back as if he had been reading it at the very moment disaster overtook him: the pitiful, sea-wracked volume was flung on to the funeral pyre and went up in odorous essence in the pure, spice-laden flames. The Fates, cruel to these two young men, ended their story in a splendid gesture.

Their fame, too, slight enough when they died, was linked and gathered strength together throughout the nineteenth century. In 1829, while in London a few stray volumes of their poems languished in the fourpenny boxes of booksellers, the Galignanis of Paris, those 'pirates' of vision and imagination, made a collection of their work and published it (together with poems by that other pure romantic, Coleridge) with a memoir of each young poet.

It was but fitting then, and it falls into the pattern or allegory of Keats's life, that the publication of his first book should be associated with Shelley. Keats's brothers and his friends, now including the enthusiastic Woodhouse and the clever, understanding Reynolds, urged publication but Shelley, wiser perhaps than they, advised against rendering up to the unfeeling eye of the public the poet's 'first blights.' Keats, however, relying on the admired and more mature judgment of Leigh Hunt and Haydon, held to his determination. But although Shelley had, protested it was probably he who introduced him to the Olliers, his own publishers: he certainly had some hand in the publication for he visited Charles Richards, the Olliers' printer, in regard to the printing of the volume. Richards said he had never had so strange a visitor. 'He was gaunt, and had peculiar starts and gestures, and a way of fixing his eyes and whole attitude for a good while, like the abstracted apathy of a musing madman.' This impression of Shelley serves to remind us that he was not in his intercourse with Keats at his social best; he was in a

nervous condition, worried about domestic affairs and financial difficulties. His elopement with Mary Godwin had further embittered his father, antagonised Godwin, helped to cause his wife's suicide and lost him his children.

The book came out in early March. 'The first volume of Keats's muse,' says Cowden Clarke, 'was launched amid the cheers and fond anticipation of all his circle. Everyone of us expected (and not unreasonably) that it would create a sensation in the literary world; for such a first production (and a considerable portion of it from a minor) has rarely occurred.'

There is necessarily a lack of restraint and power in the volume, and many echoes of the Elizabethans and of Wordsworth, the father of the romantic school. The acute sensibility of the young man had to be schooled and his wide reading among the elder poets more fully digested. It is difficult with the knowledge of his ultimate achievement fresh in the mind to assess the value of the book, and perhaps with a fear of partiality it has been too much condemned by some critics. Swinburne wrote of 'so singular an example of a stork among the cranes as the famous sonnet on Chapman's Homer . . . the value of such golden grain amid a garish harvest of tares. . . .' But tares have their own wild, luxuriant beauty, and a child will seek them out among the corn. The 1817 volume, immature though it is, has already the fluidity, the loveliness of diction characteristic of Keats and linking him with Shakespeare. Is there a line which can be picked out as definitely ugly, as unpleasing to the ear? Admitting that this young poetry is too sensuous, too little pruned; that often we cannot see the wood for the trees in the riot of 'leafy luxury,' the poems have a wild, natural beauty.

Here is a poet employing his five senses more actively than any other, perhaps, except Shakespeare, Spenser and Coleridge. In youth the senses are acuter and more tyrannous than in maturity, and it is to youth that the early Keats can bring rich delight. The boy or girl opens a volume of Keats at the first page and reads :

I stood tip-toe upon a little hill,  
The air was cooling, and so very still,  
That the sweet buds which with a modest pride  
Pull droopingly, in slanting curve aside,

Their scanty leav'd, and finely tapering stems,  
 Had not yet lost those starry diadems  
 Caught from the early sobbing of the morn.  
 The clouds were pure and white as flocks new shorn,  
 And fresh from the clear brook; sweetly they slept  
 On the blue fields of heaven, and then there crept  
 A little noiseless noise among the leaves,  
 Born of the very sigh that silence heaves: . . .

He is too young to analyse his sensation, but the breath is sharply caught. He reads on:

Open afresh your round of starry folds,  
 Ye ardent marigolds!  
 Dry up the moisture from your golden lids,  
 For great Apollo bids  
 That in these days your praises should be sung  
 On many harps, which he has lately strung. . . .  
 Here are sweet peas, on tip-toe for a flight:  
 With wings of gentle flush o'er delicate white,  
 And taper fingers catching at all things,  
 To bind them all about with tiny rings.

Here are the beauties of field and garden of which we are so rapturously aware at this age crystallised, made tangible. Our own individual vague feelings of a new delight in nature are shared by a poet and expressed by him in beautiful poetry: and, far from discouraging us in our own callow attempts at the making of verse, he seems to help us, to stimulate self-expression.

Here, too, in the first volume lovely myths are touched upon; the proper food of youth, the clear, bright stories of the childhood of the world. Here is the tale of Eros and Psyche condensed with a rare dramatic power into eight lines:

And how they kist each other's tremulous eyes:  
 The silver lamp,—the ravishment,—the wonder—  
 The darkness,—loneliness,—the fearful thunder;

Later there is a self-consciously austere period when the early Keats cloy the palate; we taste poetry rather than swallow it with the avidity of a child. When maturity comes, with its hoarding of loved beauty, we can return to the earlier work, not only recapturing some of the ecstasy of youth, but reading with a literary background, a knowledge of period, and, above all, a knowledge of the brief, sad

life of the man. It is dear to us as the dewy wide-eyed song of the poet before the shadows had closed round his heart. It is also of strong autobiographical value as a part of the pattern, or allegory of his life. His poetic growth can be watched, starting from the callow imitation of Spenser and the 'square-toed' eighteenth century lines to Hope; through the fragment 'Calidore,' with its boyish memories of knights and ladies, and the echoes of the fashionable Tom Moore in verses addressed to the Mathews; through the Epistles and sonnets to his brothers and friends revealing his young joys and interests, to the great 'Chapman's Homer' sonnet and the finer lines of the last poem in the volume, 'Sleep and Poetry,' stating the poetic creed to which he adhered throughout his life.

The choice of sonnets for the volume seems at first glance to be an arbitrary one: among those rejected there are at least four more worthy of printing than, say, 'Had I a man's fair form.' The two sonnets to Haydon on 'Seeing the Elgin Marbles' may have been omitted in view of acceptance for publication in *The Examiner* early in March. 'After dark vapours,' charming in its slow, gentle movement, had the approval of Leigh Hunt who printed it in a February *Examiner*. It is possible that Keats discarded it because of the colloquial use in the sixth line of 'feel' as a substantive; though as Colvin pointed out in connection with Keats's use of it in the first draft of 'In a Drear-nighted December,' 'feel' which after all was good enough for Horace Walpole and Fanny Burney was to Keats and the Leigh Hunt circle no vulgarism at all, it was a thing of everyday usage both in verse and prose.' The sonnet beginning 'This pleasant tale is like a little copse' with its happy epithet 'the tender-legged linnet' and its lovely line

Oh! what a power hath white simplicity!

is charming and was written under happy associations; Keats wrote it at the end of 'The Floore and the Lefe' in a volume of Cowden Clarke's Chaucer when he came home one day and found his friend asleep on the sofa with the volume beside him. Clarke claims it as 'an extempore effusion and written without the alteration of a single word.' Keats may have omitted it because in the last two lines he

rimes 'sobblings' and 'robins.' This was a correct ear-rime and had the authority of Wordsworth, for sobbing was pronounced 'sobbin' far into the nineteenth century. It was not, however, an eye-rime, and it would seem as if in serious poetry the eye-rime was preserved, though in lighter pieces it was often dispensed with. Even the correct Pope could write :

This gallery's contrived for walking,  
The window to retire and talk in ;

Cowden Clarke tells us that the dedication sonnet to Leigh Hunt was also extempore, and this time he was fully awake to vouch for it. It was written 'on the evening when the last proof-sheet was brought from the printer.' The bearer of the proof, probably Charles Ollier himself, said that if Keats wished to print a dedication he must have it at once. There were several friends in the room, and 'in the buzz of a mixed conversation' Keats quietly withdrew to a side table and wrote the poem without the alteration of a single word.

The book did not sell. 'It was read,' said Keats, 'by some dozen of my friends who lik'd it; and some dozen whom I was unacquainted with, who did not.' Among the 'dozen' admirers was Haydon, who wrote in his customary extravagant style, 'I have read your "Sleep and Poetry"—it is a flash of lightening that will round men from their occupations and keep them trembling for the crash of thunder that *will* follow.' Other friends, including Charles Ollier, sent flattering sonnets.

Cowden Clarke laments, 'Alas, the book might have emerged in Timbuctoo with far stronger chance of fame and approbation.' He attributed its failure entirely to Keats's avowed discipleship of Leigh Hunt, 'A Radical and a dubbed partizan of the first Napoleon, because when alluding to him, Hunt did not always subjoin the fashionable cognomen of Corsican Monster.' But Cowden Clarke in his partiality is exaggerating the neglect of the book; there are six known reviews of it, and in every one he was recognised as a poet of promise. Three, it is true, were written by friends, but the three independent ones were in solid journals, Constable's *Edinburgh and Scots Magazine*, the *Eclectic Review*, an important nonconformist organ, and the *Monthly Magazine*, a non-

party journal on the side of reform. In the *Eclectic* he shared the honour of notice with the fashionable Lord Byron for his *Lament of Tasso* and in the *Edinburgh* with the elder poet Coleridge for *Sybilline Leaves*.

From the literary point of view Hunt's notice in the *Examiner* is the most important, coming from a man whom we acknowledge to be a fine critic : but from a historical aspect the three impartial reviews are of value in showing, not only contemporary and varying attitudes to this new poet, but to poetry in general. The two long ones are heavy reading, written in the ponderous, involved style then in fashion among the older journals, but they show a vivid interest in the new poetry and the way it was to develop.

Only the born critics ; Hazlitt, Lamb, Hunt, Coleridge could visualise clearly enough their generation to know that the romantic movement was an entire change of outlook, of heart. These professional reviewers cannot be blamed if they were near-sighted and cautious in assuming romantic poetry to be merely a new mode of presentation, a new set of mannerisms. They were still inclined to demand that poetry shall be improving, didactic in the full eighteenth-century manner, or the vehicle for simple sentiment in the later vogue. They were uneasy about the trend of the new poetry and inclined to suspect as licentious the attitude presented in Keats's motto to his book from Spenser's 'Muiopotmos' :

What more felicity can fall to creature,  
Than to enjoy delight with liberty,

and they still found it difficult to free their ears from the tyranny of the balanced antithesis of the Popean couplet.

Constable's *Edinburgh Magazine* (October, 1817) gave three and three-quarter pages, with long quotations. In his opening paragraph the critic said :

(Mr. Keats) is said to be a very young man and a particular friend of Messrs Hunt, the editors of the *Examiner*, and of Mr. Hazlitt. His youth accounts well enough for some injudicious luxuriations and other faults in his poems ; and his intimacy with two of the wittiest writers of their day, sufficiently vouches for his intellect and taste. Going altogether out of the road of high raised passion and romantic enterprise, in which many ordinary versifiers have been drawn after the example of the famous poets

of our time, he has attached himself to a model more pure than some of these, we imagine; and at the same time, as poetical as the best of them. "Sage, serious *Spencer*," (sic), the most melodious and mildly fanciful of our old English poets, is Mr. Keats's favourite. . . .

He found in the poems, in addition to 'abundant *Spencerianisms*' 'a great deal of that *picturesqueness* of fancy and licentious brilliancy of epithet which distinguishes the early Italian Novelists and amorous poets . . . the careless, sketchy, capricious and yet archly-thoughtful manner of *Pulci* and *Ariosto*.' After quoting freely from 'I stood tip-toe' and the Epistles in a tone of praise, he added:

These specimens will be enough to shew that Mr. K. has ventured on ground dangerous for a young poet;—calculated, we think, to fatigue his ingenuity, and try his resources of fancy, without producing any permanent effect adequate to the expenditure of either.

He then criticised the supposed models of Keats, Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt. They were

. . . vivacious, smart, witty, changeful, sparkling, and learned—full of bright points and flashy expressions that strike and even seem to please by a sudden boldness of novelty,—rather abounding in familiarities of conception and oddnesses of manner which shew ingenuity, even though they be perverse, or common, or contemptuous . . . they appear to be too full of conceits and sparkling points, ever to excite any thing more than a cold approbation at the long-run—and too fond, even in their favourite descriptions of nature, of a reference to the factitious resemblances of society, ever to touch the heart. Their verses are straggling and uneven, without the lengthened flow of blank verse, or the pointed connection of couplets.

He spoke of the danger to this school of 'the inlets of vulgarity.' These poets forget 'the appalling doom which awaits the faults of mannerism or the ambition of a sickly refinement.'

If Mr. Keats does not forthwith cast off the uncleannesses of this school, he will never make his way to the truest strain of poetry in which, taking him by himself, it appears he might succeed.



Extolling the simple poetry of the heart, he quoted 'O Solitude' and 'To one who has been long in city pent,' in which the poet expressed his love of nature 'so touchingly' and, quoting the sonnet to Haydon, 'Highmindedness, a jealousy for good,' said it had 'the veritable air of Milton' He added :

We are sorry that we can quote no more of these sweet verses which have in them so deep a tone of moral energy, and such a zest of the pathos of genius. We are loth to part with this poet of promise, and are vexed that critical justice requires us to mention some passages of considerable affectation, and marks of offensive haste. . . . "Leafy luxury," "jaunty streams," "lawny slope," "the moon-beamy air," "a sun-beamy tale," these, if not namby-pamby, are at least the "holiday and lady terms" of these poor affected creatures who write verses "in spite of nature and their stars."

With a word or two more of criticism, he ended by quoting the 'glorious and Virgilian conception'

. . . the moon lifting her silver rim  
Above a cloud, and with a gradual swim  
Coming into the blue with all her light.

and compared it to

*Ipse Pater, mediâ nimborum in nocte coruscâ  
Fulmina molitur dextra.*

The *Eclectic* review (September, 1817), almost certainly by the owner-editor, Josiah Conder,<sup>1</sup> was rather more severe but, on the whole, just. In the opening remarks upon modern poetry, the writer said :

. . . Wordsworth is by far the deepest thinker of our modern poets, yet he has been sometimes misled by a false theory, to adopt a puerile style of composition ; . . . Scott, of all our leading poets, though the most exquisite artist, occupies the lowest rank in respect of the intellectual quality of his productions. . . . To Mr. Hunt's poetical genius we have repeatedly borne testimony, but the affectation which vitiates his style must needs be aggravated to a ridiculous excess in the copyist.

<sup>1</sup> The copy of the *Eclectic* in the London Library is marked, in ink brown with age, with the initials of contributors. At the end of this article is 'J. C.'

He then quoted as an example of the aping of Leigh Hunt the opening sixty lines of 'I stood tip-toe,' adding this comment :

There is certainly considerable taste and sprightliness in some parts of this description, and the whole poem has a sort of summer's day glow diffused over it, but it shuts up in mist and obscurity.

This is, perhaps, though grudging, a fair criticism of the poem. We know the young poet's head was full of Greek legend, of Cynthia and Endymion, but the reviewer of 1817 could not foresee the poem yet to be born.

He considered the sonnets to be the best things in the volume and quoted 'To My Brother George.' 'Sleep and Poetry' he called a 'strange assay,' and if 'it is to be taken as the result of the Author's latest efforts, would seem to show that he was indeed far gone, beyond the reach of the efficacy either of praise or censure in affectation and absurdity.' It was natural that the personal outburst of Keats ending :

. . . yet there ever rolls  
A vast idea before me, and I glean  
Therefrom my liberty ; thence too I've seen  
The end and aim of Poesy.

would seem extravagant to the sober-minded reviewer, who comments :

We must be allowed, however, to express a doubt whether its (poetry's) nature has been as clearly perceived by the author, or he surely would never have been able to impose even on himself as poetry the precious nonsense which he has here decked out in rhyme. Mr. Keats speak of

The silence when some rhymes are coming out ;  
And when they've come, a very pleasant rout :

and to the dangerous fascination of this employment must be attributed this half-awake rhapsody.

Having scored this neat point, he indicated some defective rimes, including, strangely, *livers* and *rivers*. He then scored again with :

Mr. Keats has satirized certain *pseudo* poets, who,

With a puling infant's force  
Sway'd about upon a rocking horse  
And thought it Pegasus.

Satire is a two-edged weapon: the lines brought irresistably to our imagination the Author of these poems in the very attitude he describes.

He regretted that 'a young man of vivid imagination and fine talents should have . . . been flattered into the resolution to publish verses, of which a few years hence he will be glad to escape the remembrance. . . . To have committed oneself in the character of a versifier, is often a formidable obstacle to be surmounted in after-life.' A man should build up a reputation in some 'useful sphere of exertion' before he seeks the fame of a poet!

In summing up he hinted that he might have been mistaken in his estimate of this young man's powers (though 'the lash of a critic is the thing the least to be dreaded.'). for 'brilliant exceptions . . . make the critic's task of peculiar delicacy.' He then quoted 'Happy is England' as 'simple and pleasing.'

The short notice in the *Monthly Magazine* for April 1st is almost wholly favourable:

A small volume of poems, by Mr. KEATS, has appeared; and it well deserves the notice it has attracted by the sweetness and beauty of the compositions. For the model of his style, the author has had recourse to the age of Elizabeth; and if he has not wholly avoided the quaintness that characterises the writings of that period, it must be allowed by every candid reader that the fertile fancy and beautiful diction of our old poets, is not unfrequently rivaled by Mr. Keats. There is in his poems a rapturous glow and intoxication of the fancy—an air of careless and profuse magnificence in his diction—a revelry of the imagination and tenderness of feeling, that forcibly impress themselves on the reader.

I shall not quote extensively from the notices in *The Champion* (March 9th, 1817), now thought to be written by Reynolds, or in the *European Magazine* (May, 1817), by George Felton Mathew, for these are printed in full in Middleton Murry's *Studies in Keats*. *The Champion* review interpreted Keats's mind and poetic aims as, perhaps, only a close friend could do at this early stage and, quoting extensively, concluded with an earnest recommendation of the book to readers, giving, for further knowledge of this new poet, the two sonnets to Haydon on seeing the Elgin Marbles. The claims made for Keats in the opening paragraph are not extravagant to us but must have appeared so to contemporaries:

At a time when nothing is talked of but the power and the passion of Lord Byron, and the playful and elegant fancy of Moore, and the correctness of Rogers, and the sublimity and pathos of Campbell (these terms we should conceive are kept ready composed in the Edinburgh Review-shop) a young man starts suddenly before us, with a genius that is likely to eclipse them all.

Mathew in the *European Magazine* (in a piece of writing joyous to the modern reader, for he throws tremendous images about with the puny skill of an inexperienced juggler) objected to this bold statement, thus :

. . . we cannot, as another critic has injudiciously attempted, roll the name of Byron, Moore, Campbell and Rogers, into the milky way of literature, because Keats is pouring out his splendours in the Orient. We do not imagine that the fame of one poet, depends upon the fall of another, or that our morning and our evening stars necessarily eclipse the constellations of the meridian.

He admitted the beauty of the poems, though criticising the 'slovenly independence of his versification,' adding :

But if the gay colours and the sweet fragrance of bursting blossoms be the promise of future treasures, then we may prophesy boldly of the future eminence of our young poet, for we have no where found them so early or so beautifully displayed as in the pages of the volume before us.

He deplored the evidences of 'the foppery and affectation of Leigh Hunt' in the poems. It will be remembered that Mathew, in their early association, was not in agreement with Keats's views on poetry. He thought the attack in 'Sleep and Poetry' on Pope and the old school futile and likely to rebound against the author.

*The Champion* reviewer had regretted the inclusion of the earlier poems in the middle of the volume. To this Mathew, with a tender and perhaps rather sore feeling of old and broken association, took exception, saying they were 'of superior versification.' He quoted, as 'spirited and powerful,' the juvenile verses to Woman :

Ah ! who can e'er forget so fair a being ?  
Who can forget her half retiring sweets ?  
God ! she is like a milk-white lamb that bleats  
For man's protection.

It is a bitter reflection of the position of women a hundred years ago that apparently no contemporary found anything comic in these lines : though I feel sure that the immortal Jane, if by some chance she opened the volume, would have arched a delightful eyebrow.

The review ended with a rich ' period ' passage on the high moral aims a poet should have, with a side-hit, perhaps, at the friend now grown cold to him and whose advanced ideas had been so repugnant to his young-elderly mind.

. . . remember that there is a sublimer height to which the spirit of the muse can soar ; and that her arm is able to uphold the adamant shield of virtue, and guard the soul from those insinuating sentiments, so fatally inculcated by many of the most popular writers of the day, equally repugnant to reason and religion, which, if they touch us with their poisoned points, will contaminate our purity, inoculate us with degeneracy and corruption, and overthrow among us the dominion of domestic peace and public liberty.

After fifteen more lines in this lofty strain he ended, in a sublimely ridiculous metaphor, by saying :

. . . these observations cannot be considered impertinent to . . . one who can soar to the heights of poesy,—and ultimately hope to bind his brows with the glorious sunbeams of immortality.

Leigh Hunt's review in *The Examiner* (July, 6th and 13th) can be read in full in Mr. Blunden's *Leigh Hunt's "Examiner" Examined*. It opened with a friendly reference to Keats, ' a young poet indeed,' a friend of the writer's and already known to readers, and then gave a rapid and brilliant survey of the growth of poetry from Dryden to the new poets, ending :

Poetry, like Plenty, should be represented with a cornucopia, but it should be a real one ; not swelled out and insidiously *optimized* at the top, like Mr. Southey's stale strawberry baskets, but fine and full to the depth, like a heap from the vintage. Yet from the time of Milton till lately, scarcely a tree had been planted that could be called a poet's own. People got shoots from France, that ended in nothing but a little barren wood, from which they made flutes for young gentlemen and fan-sticks for ladies.

Keats's poetry is genuine stuff. ' The very faults indeed of Mr. Keats arise from a passion for beauties, and a young impatience to vindicate them.' He criticised the profusion

of detail and lack of selection, and the strain for variety of versification 'without a due consideration of its principles.' His criticism with regard to the handling and selection of images is genuinely constructive. He then picked out five lines, putting them under subject headings :

## A STARRY SKY.

The dark silent blue  
With all its diamonds trembling through and through.

Or,

## SOUND OF A PIPE.

And with some are hearing eagerly the wild  
Thrilling liquidity of dewy piping.

He included the 'little noiseless noise' passage and the description of the rising of the moon so highly praised in Constable's *Edinburgh Magazine*.

He had a characteristically playful and personal touch in his remarks on the Epistle to Cowden Clarke reflecting the general love for that warm-hearted man :

. . . 'Life's very toys  
With him,' said I, 'will take a pleasant charm ;  
It cannot be that ought will work him harm.'

And we can only add, without disrespect to the graver warmth of our young poet, that if Ought attempted it, Ought would find he had stout work to do with more than one person.

He then quoted again, generally under subject headings (THE OCEAN, AN ASPIRATION AFTER POETRY, etc.), and ended with this acute summing up of the book as a whole : 'It is a little luxuriant heap of

Such sights as youthful poets dream  
On summer eves by haunted stream.'

Not only is this article a brilliant piece of criticism but it is also a skilful piece of special pleading. Although hinting at the young poet's faults, it picked out and presented in tiny exquisite pictures many of the outstanding beauties of the book. It is strange, however, that neither Hunt, nor any other reviewer, singled out for praise that lovely passage which

anticipated the early maturity of thought and style to which Keats was to attain :

Stop and consider ! life is but a day ;  
 A fragile dew-drop on its perilous way  
 From a tree's summit ; a poor Indian's sleep  
 While his boat hastens to the monstrous steep  
 Of Montmorenci. Why so sad a moan ?  
 Life is the rose's hope while yet unblown ;  
 The reading of an ever-changing tale ;  
 The light uplifting of a maiden's veil ;  
 A pigeon tumbling in clear summer air ;  
 A laughing school boy, without grief or care,  
 Riding the springy branches of an elm.

In spite of these reviews, not one of them damning and one in the widely-read and powerful *Examiner*, the book did not sell. Haydon blamed the Leigh Hunt set who, he said, cried up each other so consistently that they injured their own reputations. George, boy-like, blamed the publishers and wrote a hasty letter to them, bringing back a tart reply :

By far the greater number of Persons who have purchased it from us have found fault with it in such plain terms, that we have in many cases offered to take it back rather than be annoyed with the ridicule which has, time after time, been showered upon it. In fact it was only on Saturday last that we were under the mortification of having our own opinion of its merits flatly contradicted by a Gentleman who told us he considered it ' no better than a take in.—

Keats was, after all, only sharing the fate of those other poets, now placed so much higher than the fashionable Southey, Campbell, Scott, Moore and Rogers, who were, during the whole or greater part of their life-time, ignored or scoffed at by the general public. Wordsworth (with the *Lyrical Ballads* published as far back as 1798) only sold very sparingly until well into the thirties of the nineteenth century.

There was one critic of the volume whose opinion as such was negligible, but who unfortunately had that power over Keats which the control of the purse-strings can give. Let us go forward to 1827 and hear Richard Abbey talking to John Taylor over their wine. Let us visualise him stout, red-faced, complacent, stretching his white cotton-stockinged legs out comfortably before him. He has just told Taylor how, when John told him he was determined to gain

his living by writing poetry, he 'called him a Silly Boy, and prophesied a speedy Termination to his inconsiderate Enterprise.'

'He brought me,' he went on, 'not long after a little book which he had got printed. I took it and said I would look at it because it was his writing, otherwise I should not have troubled my head with any such thing. When we next met I said: "Well, John, I have read your book, and it reminds me of the Quaker's horse which was hard to catch, and good for nothing when he was caught—so your book is hard to understand and good for nothing when it is understood."'

The worthy Abbey must, since he laboured it so heavily, have appreciated his own jest. He must have looked sharply at Taylor to see if he too were amused. No doubt Taylor, ever a cautious man and anxious to get more information out of Keats's guardian for the memoir he was contemplating, smiled a little wider and filled up the old man's glass. Abbey spoke again:

'Do you know, I don't think he ever forgave me for uttering this opinion, which, however, was the truth.'



## CHAPTER VIII

*New Friendships ; Reynolds, Rice and Bailey. (December, 1816-March, 1817)*

THE WINTER AND EARLY SPRING OF 1817 WAS A PERIOD of new contacts and experiences. The mind of Keats, fixed to the rock of his own character and individuality, was reaching out its tentacles and grasping food for new poetry and thought.

He must have spent many hours in Leigh Hunt's book-lined study and in Haydon's crowded painting-room. Although public association with Hunt did damage to Keats's reputation, and although Hunt perhaps encouraged him unduly in his native luxuriance of sentiment and expression, his influence was a fruitful one. Hunt was a fine and a constructive critic (his reputation as a critic has been overshadowed in that age so rich in criticism by Hazlitt, Coleridge and Lamb) and, though as a writer of poetry his taste was faulty, it was fastidious, epicurean in his reading of it. Later in *Imagination and Fancy* he shewed how swiftly he was able to get at the heart of a poet. He could bring Keats, not only into closer acquaintance with the Elizabethans, but into his first knowledge of that wealth of poetry from which the Elizabethans drew their early inspiration, the Italian. Keats could not yet read the language, but he had a fair knowledge of Latin, and he would hear its beautiful cadences as Leigh Hunt read it aloud to him. We know that Hunt's reading of poetry was a joy to his friends. Keats could not fail, with his keen ear, to catch something of the liquid and lovely movement. Colvin pointed out that the opening of the sonnet, 'On a Picture of Leander' (now considered to have been written in 1817):

Come hither all sweet maidens soberly,  
 Down-looking aye, and with a chastened light . . .  
 Hid in the fringes of your eyelids white,  
 And meekly let your fair hands joined be. . . .

has a feeling of :

Voi',<sup>1</sup> che portate la sembianza umile,  
 Cogli occhi bassi mostrando dolore,  
 Onde venite, ch'è'l vostro colore  
 Par divenuto di pietà simile ?

This is the invocation by Dante in *La Vita Nuova* to the ladies who wept over Beatrice's grief for her dead father.

The movement of the rest of the sonnet seems to me to have strongly the feeling of 'Hero and Leander,' and it is possible that Hunt directed or re-directed Keats's attention to Marlowe, whom he placed high. 'If ever there was a born poet,' he wrote, 'Marlowe was one . . . Marlowe and Spenser are the first of our poets who perceived the beauty of words . . . as receiving and reflecting beauty through the feeling of the ideas.'

Haydon encouraged and strengthened Keats's ambition and illuminated by flashes of his electric mind the ardent spirit groping after an ultimate beauty. Crowded in by his huge canvas and the casts of the new and wonderful Elgin Marbles he read Shakespeare with his friend. 'Except the blind forces of Nature, nothing lives in this world which is not Greek in origin,' and here were the old and the new, a heady wine to ferment in the head of this young arch-romantic. Shakespeare must have come to Keats with a stronger reality, a subtler fragrance in the midst of these mighty fragments of the ancient, basic civilisation. There were evenings of pure delight. Haydon wrote: 'I have enjoyed Shakespeare more with Keats than with any other human creature.'

But there is a degree of fruitful intimacy in youth which can only be enjoyed with others of the same age. These men were older; mature men to be looked up to. Haydon was thirty-one and Leigh Hunt forty-two. Keats was modest and well aware of his own deficiencies, both on the score of youth

<sup>1</sup> Ye that bear a lowly mien, with eyes downcast betraying grief,  
 whence come ye, for your hue seems grown to pity's semblance.

(THOMAS OKEY's translation.)

and of a lack of background. The new friends he made within the Hunt-Haydon circle were to bring him intellectual and social intercourse with younger people.

There was living at 19 Lamb's Conduit Street, within easy calling-distance of Cheapside, a cheerful, clever family of Shropshire origin. The parents, George and Charlotte Reynolds, were lively people with literary interests, friendly with Lamb, Leigh Hunt, Haydon and Hazlitt. George Reynolds had been appointed writing-master at Christ's Hospital (the Blue Coat School), then in Little Britain, and was waiting to move in to one of the masters' houses in its precincts. His wife wrote album verses and later published a novel which was admired by Charles Lamb. There were four daughters and one son, John Hamilton Reynolds, who soon became an intimate friend of Keats. The third daughter, Eliza, though still in her teens, was already married to a Mr. Longmore, a physician practising at Upwell, a village in Norfolk. Keats's only known connection with her is that, one day in the February of 1818, when she was on a visit to her father's house, he gave her a copy of his sonnet to Spenser. With the two elder daughters, Jane and Marianne, the relations of both George and John Keats were easy and pleasant. Marianne was George's favourite but, if we can judge from his letters to her, John seems to have been more friendly with Jane. The two earlier letters to Jane are among his most delightful. She, and indeed all the family, shared his interest in Shakespeare. Marianne had musical tastes as well as literary. Though she may have been more gifted than Jane she was apparently the rather cold type of woman that did not attract Keats. Charles Dilke, a friend of the family, said of her: 'She was a very beautiful girl—somewhat cold and saturnine, and though always admired not generally liked.'

John Reynolds, though only a year older than Keats, had achieved a precocious literary reputation. Before *The Naiad*, quoted and praised by Leigh Hunt in the *Examiner* article on December 1st, 1816, he had already published three books. *Safie, an Eastern Tale* (1814) was dedicated to Byron and praised by him. Reynolds was fairly generally regarded as a young poet of great promise; a promise he was not to fulfil. For a time he was a clerk in the Amicable Insurance Company

(now absorbed into the Norwich Union) but seems to have left this employ after April, 1816, for a literary life. He worked for *The Champion*, a Sunday paper under the editorship of John Scott, writing dramatic and other criticisms. It will be remembered that the friendly review of *Poems*, 1817, in that journal is attributed to him. He was wit as well as poet. This was an age of good sayings. The eighteenth century art of conversation had not yet died though it was fast degenerating into the punning so skilfully used by Lamb. Reynolds was a constant entertainment to his companions. He played artfully upon words and had a knack of making Shakespearean puns. Asked once if the beef he was eating was good, he replied: 'It would be if damned custom had not *braised*<sup>1</sup> it.' John Clare, the poet, has given us a lively portrait of him in 1823:

He was the most good-natured fellow I ever met with. His face was three-in-one of fun, wit and punning personified. He would punch you with his puns very keenly without ever hurting your feelings, for if you looked in his face you could not be offended; and you might retort as you pleased—nothing could put him out of humour, either with himself or others. . . . He sits as a careless listener at table, looking on with a quiet knapping sort of eye, then turns towards you as quick as lightning when he has a pun, joke or story to give you . . . flashes of the moment and mostly happy. He is a slim sort of make, something . . . of an unpretending sort of fashionable fellow without the desire of being one. . . . He is quite at home with content.

Clare describes him as having 'a plump round face, and nose something prigish, and a forehead that betrays more of fun than poetry. . . . He is a man of genius, and if his talent was properly employed he would do something. . . . Himself is his only hindrance at present.' Reynolds wrote of himself as early as 1816: 'I am one of those unfortunate youths to whom the Muses have glanced a sparkling of her light—one of those who pant for distinction but have not within them that immortal power to command it.'

It is probably that much of his ease and fun was a mask to conceal, not only a smouldering but fruitless ambition after

<sup>1</sup> See *Hamlet* iii, iv, 37.

the highest, but a certain diffidence in company. He wrote in an unpublished poem :

Those whom my heart hath chosen for its own  
Are crown'd with all my feelings—and they take  
Their seat upon my thought, as on a throne,—  
And there repose for ever,—Doubts ne'er shake  
My fair allegiance to the friends I make  
My trusted ones ;—But I am slow to woo  
A Stranger's fellowship,—Reserve doth break  
My course from that warm path which crowds pursue  
But well my heart doth hallow its selected few !

Among the 'selected few' before he met Keats were James Rice, a young solicitor, and Benjamin Bailey, an undergraduate at Oxford. The tastes of Reynolds, Rice and Bailey, a trio of friendship, can be gathered from a set of commonplace books<sup>1</sup> kept by three girls, daughters of a Unitarian family of Slade in Devon, the Misses Leigh. The three young men were on terms of sentimental friendship with them and used frequently to visit them between 1814 and 1816. In their circle was Eliza Powell Drewe, the future wife of Reynolds, and it may have been at their house that he met her.

In these commonplace books, elegant little volumes filled with fine, sloping handwriting, are extracts from writers, supplied or suggested by the young men, together with original poems by Reynolds and Bailey and a few by Rice. There is a long passage by Reynolds in praise of 'The Excursion,' indicating the proper frame of mind in which to approach that sober poem, which is important as shewing in what degree he shared with Keats, not only an adoration of Shakespeare, but an admiration for the living poet. He had also a love for Spenser whom he placed next to Shakespeare. These young people, like the young Keats and Mathew circle, had their admirations for those fashionable writers now long forgotten. There is from Reynolds a graceful little tribute in verse to Mrs. Tighe. The poems by him show, on the whole, little distinction and, curiously enough, no wit. Their chief subjects are nature and friendship and their style is the fashionable Byronic, with lugubrious references to death and disappointments in life. There are

<sup>1</sup> In the Keats Museum.

wan apostrophisings of a romantic moon. The verses by Bailey are weaker and even more lugubrious. The moon, a melancholy moon, is his goddess, and he writes by her light, alone at the midnight hour. Of those written by Rice, one is so pleasant, and we know so little about that lovable man,<sup>1</sup> that it seems worth while to quote it in full :

Your nice Definers tell you that a Glutton  
In quantity not quality delights  
Equal to him is Ven'son, beef or Mutton  
Nought comes amiss to his good appetites.  
Gluttons in love Coquettes most surely are  
Equal to them the Coxcomb or the wise  
For 'Tom, Dick, Jack or Will they little care  
'Tis not the men but Lover's that they prize  
But when your Lover or your Dish you'd chuse  
Do you dear Girl steer clear of either vice  
Shun crowding fops, and Surfeiting Ragouts  
And stick to honest hearts, and humble

*Rice*

The verses are given above as written in Rice's own firm handwriting. Rice was probably a little older than the other two but we do not know his age. Tantalisingly, there is in the commonplace books a birthday-poem from Reynolds to Rice, dated August 18th, 1815, so that we can gather from it the day and the month of his birth but not the year. Keats wrote of Rice, he 'is the most sensible and even wise man I know. He has a few John Bull prejudices, but they improve him.' Reynolds said: 'He was a quiet true wit—extremely well read—had great taste and sound judgment. For every quality that makes the sensible companion—the valuable friend—the gentleman, and the Man—I have known no one to surpass him.' He had poor health but good spirits and fine powers of recovery. 'Master Jemmy . . . always comes on his Legs like a Cat.' It was through one of Rice's frequent illnesses that he and his friends had met the Misses Leigh. He had in 1814 been down at Sidmouth for his health.

Keats was to pass many of his most carefree hours with Rice. Though a 'most sensible and even wise man' he was far from being a prig. Through him Keats got 'initiated into a little band—they call drinking deep dying scarlet . . . they

<sup>1</sup> Was he related to the Rev. Edward Rice, afterwards Head Master of Christ's Hospital.

call good Wine a pretty tippie, and call getting a Child knocking out an apple, stopping at a Tavern they call hanging out.' These men played cards at one another's houses and gambled after the fashion of the age. After one all night sitting Keats was left with only a sixpence to his name. In letters to Reynolds he reveals his poetic life but in the serious letters to Rice (there are only four in all) he is more purely psychological, telling Rice of morbid feelings and odd states of mind often shared, apparently, by Rice himself.

Benjamin Bailey, four years older than Keats, was the 'man of principle,' a more correct man than these other two, addicted to moralisings and extracts from the more serious writers. His favourite poet was Milton. He was studying for orders and in later life became Archdeacon of Colombo. In the spring of 1817 he was up at Oxford and did not become acquainted with Keats until later in the year. His interest in him was aroused by the 1817 volume and by the glowing references to him in Reynolds's letters. Although a man of rather self-conscious rectitude, he seems to have had one very human weakness. He had a strong affection for what I am sure he called 'the fair sex' but he was fickle. At one time he was paying court to Thomasine, or Tamsine Leigh at Slade. He seems to have been not without humour. There is in the commonplace books an impromptu by him 'On a Parson with a weak voice and weaker understanding':

Too small his voice—So puny in his mind  
That like a reed he whistles to the wind.

He was a close student and ardent reader. 'I should not,' Keats wrote to him, 'like to be Pages in your way when you are in a tolerably hungry mood you have no Mercy. Your teeth are like the Rock Tarpeian down which you capsize Epic Poems like *Mad*—I would not for 40 Shillings be Coleridge's *Lay's* (*Lay Sermons*) in your way.'

In the Reynolds household there was one other daughter who was rather young to be on equal terms with Keats, Charlotte, at this time barely fifteen. She was, however, able to give her new friend a great deal of pleasure: she would play to him for hours on the pianoforte. That charming fugitive piece 'Hush! hush! tread softly! hush, hush, my dear!' with its thistledown tiptoe movement, was

composed to a Spanish air she played to him. The tender 'I had a dove and the sweet dove died' was also written 'to some Music as it was playing.' Probably she, or Marianne, sang for there are several other sets of words for music written about this time, some of which ('Hither, hither, love' for example) are so true to the weaker popular songs of the period that they read like subtle parodies. It was Charlotte who gave him the Tassie gem which inspired the sonnet on Leander quoted above. These 'gems' were small coloured paste reproductions of engraved gems in classical subjects. They were sold in numbers by an enterprising Scot in Leicester Square and were used as letter seals.

One other member of the Reynolds family must not be forgotten. There was an old cat, a doughty fighter, whom Keats has immortalised in a delightful sonnet, Miltonian in form, with a full-bodied epic flavour :

CAT ! who hast pass'd thy grand climacteric,  
 How many mice and rats hast in thy days  
 Destroy'd ?—How many tit bits stolen ? Gaze  
 With those bright languid segments green, and prick  
 Those velvet ears—but pr'ythee do not stick  
 Thy latent talons in me—and upraise  
 Thy gentle mew—and tell me all thy frays  
 Of fish and mice, and rats and tender chick.  
 Nay, look not down, nor lick thy dainty wrists—  
 For all the wheezy asthma,—and for all  
 Thy tail's tip is nick'd off—and though the fists  
 Of many a maid have given thee many a maul,  
 Still is that fur as soft as when the lists  
 In youth thou enter'dst on glass bottled wall.

There was another house in London, this time further afield, where Keats could hear music, and of a more professional standard than within the family circle at Lamb's Conduit Street. Vincent Novello, 'the golden-hearted musician,' beloved of Lamb and Hunt, lived at 240 Oxford Street, at the end of the Town by the Tyburn toll-gate. He was the first man in England to edit Mozart in popular form, and the father of Alfred Novello, the founder of the famous firm of music publishers. He had a chamber-organ, and at his evening parties (in the words of Charles Lamb) converted 'his drawing-room into a chapel, his week days into Sunday, and these latter into minor heaven . . . till the coming in



of the friendly supper-tray . . . and a draught of the true Lutheran beer.' The musical atmosphere was not however always religious. Novello and his friends enjoyed the music from the Italian operas then so fashionable. Leigh Hunt was frequently there and would sing arias in his voice of a remarkable range and sweetness. Here Keats would have heard Haydn, Mozart, the religious music of Bach, Purcell and probably, for the Novellos had a lively interest in contemporary music, some early Beethoven. A little daughter, Mary Victoria, was listening in a quiet corner, and, although too young to join in, she looked with the awe of an intelligent child on these distinguished people; musicians, poets, writers, actors, and the artists, among them Varley, Copley Wood, Havell and Cristall, whose water-colours hung round on the delicately-tinted pink wallpaper. 'I have even now,' she wrote in her old age, 'full recollection of the reverent look with which I regarded John Keats as he leaned against the side of the organ, listening with rapt attention to my father's music. Keats's favourite position—one foot raised on his other knee—still remains imprinted on my memory.'

The Novellos, 'the most catholic of Catholics, for their spirit embraced the whole world,' were not only musicians, but people of culture and breadth of mind, and when the supper-tray put an end to music their conversation ranged over world affairs, literature, painting, and the stage. There was plenty of fun, too, and punning, especially when Lamb was there.

Apart from his connection with the Leigh Hunt circle, Keats had a personal link with the Novellos; Edward Holmes, his old schoolfellow, was a pupil of Vincent's and at one time lived with the family. It was Cowden Clarke who, as he had fostered the spirit of poetry in Keats, trained and encouraged young Holmes in music and introduced him to his old friends. The house in Oxford Street was a second home to Clarke and Leigh Hunt records how, when there was music, he 'groaned a hundred times of an evening in the fullness of his satisfaction,' so that one could hear 'the benevolent grind of his epiglottis.' When she was husband-high, Mary Victoria became his wife. She has, apart from her connection with the famous group of friends, a distinction of her own; she gave us our first Shakespeare concordance.

We know nothing of the movements of Tom at this period, or whether he ever accompanied Kcats on his visits to Leigh Hunt, Haydon, to the Novellos or to Lamb's Conduit Street. It is possible that at some time after September 1816 he was living in France, at Lyons. The only fact of which we can be certain is that at the end of March 1817 he was with his brothers. It is probable that he was already failing in health, for by March 26th they had moved out to Hampstead, perhaps in search of purer air for him.

## CHAPTER IX

### *Hampstead, the Isle of Wight, and Oxford* (*March–November, 1817*)

A steeple issuing from a leafy rise,  
With farmy fields in front, and sloping green,  
Dear Hampstead, is thy southern face serene,  
Silently smiling on approaching eyes.  
Within, thine ever-shifting looks surprise,—  
Streets, hills, and dells, trees overhead now seem,  
Now down below, with smoking roofs between,—  
A village revelling in varieties.

(LEIGH HUNT.)

THE MODERN SUBURB OF HAMPSTEAD STILL RETAINS MUCH of the flavour of that old village, though it and the houses, farms and scattered hamlets to be seen from its church-crowned height are now all joined up into long arms of bricks and mortar embracing the Heath which, happily, no builder can touch.

The Heath itself is but a pale shadow of the Heath Leigh Hunt loved. In the midst of open fields and meadows and as yet undrained, it was wild, natural country. There were stretches of marsh and bog. Buck bean, kingcups, anemones, crowfoot, marsh and dog violets, ragged robin, stitchwort, wild geraniums and vetches grew in a sweet abundance; and bryony, pennywort, speedwell, nightshade and yellow loosestrife. There are a few hawthorns left of its ancient spring glory, and a little gorse, but in 1817 there were wild cherries, pears, crabs and bullace plums. A myriad of small life crept and scrambled in the tangled grass and bushes; red admirals, brimstone and yellow butterflies fluttered in the sight.

All this country quiet and loveliness was within easy walking distance of London (as distances were judged in those

walking days) and a fare to the Bank was only one shilling outside the coach and one and sixpence in.

Keats and his brothers took lodgings in Well Walk, a wide, pleasant road on the height, leading on to the Heath and bordered with ancient limes. The Walk is now sleepily restful in its old age, but once it was gay and bustling with leisured life, for there was a mineral spring there and the Hampstead Spa was a rival to Tunbridge Wells. In 1817 its heyday was over. The flying coaches were carrying people in summer to a newer attraction, the sea; to Hastings, Weymouth, South End, Margate and Brighton with their Assembly Rooms, their balls and their card-tables.

But Hampstead was near enough for a rural jaunt and a pleasant place for Londoners to retire to: the Assembly, with its Long Room for dancing and its card-tables above, had, too, the added attraction to girls and match-making mothers of a Barracks near by, and red-coated officers for dancing and flirting. These were post-war days, and the men returned from battle were as eager for pleasure as they were in 1919. With the slackening of etiquette brought about by war and revolution; a licence in the higher ranks of society which descended as a wider freedom to the middle classes; with the comparatively new and seductive waltz as a symbol of this new order of things, there was gaiety in Well Walk.

But Keats would take little or no part in these festivities. The brothers were not well off and although Keats loved his friends, the society of acquaintances never attracted him. He did not dance. The quiet beauty of the Heath, fit home for a poet, was there as a background for his dreams of Endymion.

The house in which the brothers lodged stood next to the Green Man (now the Wells Tavern), and was pulled down when the inn was rebuilt. It was a tall, narrow house belonging to Bentley, the village postman. Mrs. Bentley was a motherly soul and kind to the young men. The only drawback to the lodging was the noisy presence of the Bentley boys who further offended by the smell of their coarse worsted stockings.

Keats had only to walk down a short slope of the Heath to Hunt's cottage in the Vale of Health. The two men must

have spent many hours of good talk together. Hunt was writing 'The Nymphs' and, so Keats wrote, was saying in it 'a number of beautiful things.' Keats was not alone in admiring Hunt's work; Hazlitt, Lamb, Moore, Rogers and Byron all enjoyed and praised it. Haydon said of *The Story of Rimini* it is 'the sweetest thing of the time . . . it will establish your genius.' Unequal as that poem is, it has a flexibility of style and a freedom in the use of language new to its first readers, and (to quote Mr. Blunden) 'it brought into the Northern air a welcome Southern warmth and vinous brilliance, urging the senses of poets to triumph over a bleak environment and to irradiate it with the sunshine and azure of Ariosto's country.' This was no mean gift to the poet who was presently to write 'The Eve of St. Agnes.'

The poem was moderately popular among general readers and became a mild fashion. Samuel Rogers, the banker-poet, quoted it at his breakfasts and women shed tears over the sad story of Paolo and Francesca. Hunt had a gift for narrative and, when the exuberance of a long-protracted youth had been sobered away, he gave us his one perfect poem, a story in little, 'Abou Ben Adhem.' This, the lyric 'Jenny kiss'd me,' and that popular Victorian recitation, 'The Glove and the Lions' are the only works by which he is popularly known as a poet to-day. Towards the end of his life he wrote with regret of *The Story of Rimini*, wishing he had not enlarged upon Dante's famous episode 'which had been treated with exquisite sufficiency, and to his immortal renown, by a great master.' With his fine ear for good lines in other poets he must have regretted that he had dulled the perfection of *la bocca mi bacò tutto tremante* into 'And kiss'd her, mouth to mouth, all in a tremble.'

Keats was re-reading *The Story of Rimini* in the freshness of the spring of 1817 and he wrote a sonnet on it, commencing:

Who loves to peer up at the morning sun,  
With half-shut eyes and comfortable cheek,  
Let him, with this sweet tale, full often seek  
For meadows where the little rivers run;

Alas, for the meadows where the little rivers ran in a network of 'little brooks unknown to all but the eyes of their lovers'; the massy elms and the rose-hedgerowed

lanes . . . they are gone for ever. Where are now Kilburn, Cricklewood, West Hampstead and Marylebone they lay spread out, a wide and lovely prospect, to the south and south-west of the Hampstead heights ; in one direction the dome of St. Paul's glittering above the smoke pall of London and in the other the church-crowned bosky hill of Harrow. London had been expanding rapidly since the beginning of the century. This, like our own post-war period, was an era of feverish building, but it had not yet destroyed more than a few miles of the country north of the Edgware Road. On March 27th Keats went with Hunt to Novello's house by the Tyburn Gate to hear performed, or to carry thither, a hymn for four voices 'To the Spirit great and good,' the words and music of which were composed by Hunt. It is more than likely that they walked there, going through open country until they reached Seymour Place. If they started from Well Walk they would go down Field Place and follow a footpath across the Conduit Fields (now covered by Fitzjohn's Avenue). They would pass Shepherd's Well, the main water supply for Hampstead, and see there a patient crowd of poor people waiting their turn with pitchers, and men with yoked buckets to carry water to those willing to pay twopence or threepence a pail for it. The spring, under a low brick arch, would sometimes fail, so heavily was it taxed by those who had not pumps or wells, and then the tired folk would wait until it bubbled up again.

The two men would walk across fields passing St. John's Wood Farm, the Chapel and the cricket ground soon to become Lord's, across the new Regent's Canal and down the arcadian Lisson Grove. The spirit sighs after that lost wealth of green lanes and meadows. . . .

The intimacy with Hunt, necessarily closer because they were living so near to one another, was perhaps resented by the egocentric Haydon who tried to draw Keats away from Hunt ; characteristically making a motive for himself. He told himself that Hunt's free-thinking would damage the morals of his young friend and he tried to bring Keats, who had long broken away from orthodox belief, back to the straight and narrow path. He wrote to him in March a strange rhodomontade,<sup>1</sup> telling how the mighty spirits of

<sup>1</sup> Given in full in *Letters of John Keats*, 1936 edition.

the immortal dead crowded his room and shook their hands at him 'in awful encouragement':

My dear Keats, the Friends who surrounded me were sensible to what talent I had,—but no one reflected my enthusiasm with that burning ripeness of soul, my heart yearned for sympathy,—believe me from my Soul in you I have found one,—you add fire when I am exhausted, & excite fury afresh—I offer my heart & intelligence & experience—at first I feared your ardor might lead you to disregard the accumulated wisdom of ages in moral points—but the feelings put forth lately have delighted my soul. . . .

Keats was in a mood to be influenced against Hunt, familiarity with whom was breeding some measure of contempt. Poetry was to Keats the stuff of life, not a bookish abstraction, and Hunt's refuge from reality in books and riming could not be for long a congenial home to a mind as robust and universal. Hunt had at this time an exaggerated opinion of his own powers. This, sound critic that he was, he realised in later years and admitted in his autobiography. The young are never tolerant of pretensions and Keats had by now estimated him at something like his true value as a poet. Hunt was, too, more than a little fantastic in his romanticism; his flowery little celebrations of occasions and of anniversaries with sonnets and garlandings were boyish gambols for the greater Keats. There had been one absurd evening when Hunt and Keats over their after-dinner wine crowned each other with laurels and ivy 'after the manner of the elder bards' and wrote sonnets. Some lady visitors came in: Hunt snatched off his crown and suggested to Keats that he should do so, but Keats 'in his enthusiastic way declared he would not take off his crown for any human being.' He kept it on without any explanation during the ladies' call. This unusual headgear must have excited some astonishment in their minds, and probably Keats enjoyed their bewilderment. He was, however, afterwards ashamed of the prank and in a half-humorous hymn to Apollo he asked,

Where—where slept thine ire,  
When like a blank idiot I put on thy wreath,  
Thy laurel, thy glory,  
The light of thy story,  
Or was I a worm—too low crawling, for death?  
O Delphic Apollo!



THE LIFE MASK OF JOHN KEATS





This was not the first time he had felt the illustrious leaves upon his brow; in 1815 some ladies (the Misses Mathew?) sent him a laurel crown.

There is a second version of this story in which Thomas Love Peacock is involved. The first evidence that we have of a meeting between Keats and the poet and satirist is a year later, in the spring of 1818, but it is unlikely that Keats would have taken part in this poetic prank at that time especially as he was then out of sympathy with Leigh Hunt in regard to poetry. It is easy in recollection to slip a year and it seems likely that it was on this occasion that Peacock made his entry. If Keats insisted on retaining his crown of leaves under Peacock's withering eye he must have been a youth of almost superhuman courage. The incident as reported in *Fraser's Magazine* for August, 1831, is worth quoting:

Some time ago it entered the imagination of Hunt and Keats and some other of that coterie, to crown themselves with laurel and to take off their cravats. This was the jaunty thing and quite poetical. While the coronated and uncravated company were sitting thus one day "with their singing robes about them" Peacock came in. "Do" said the lady who officiated as coronet manufacturer "do, dear Mr. Peacock, let me weave you a chaplet, and put it on your head; then you will all sit as poets together." "No ma'am" said Peacock, wiping his head, "no, ma'am; you may make a fool of your own husband, but there is no need of your making a fool of me."

There was another of the younger generation who was impatient with Hunt and one who now had a considerable influence with Keats, John Reynolds. Three years later we find Reynolds writing to John Taylor of 'the vain and heartless eternity of Mr. Leigh Hunt's indecent discourings . . . that Feeble Man. . . .'

On March 17th Keats wrote to Reynolds:

My Brothers are anxious that I should go by myself into the country—they have always been extremely fond of me, and now that Haydon has pointed out how necessary it is that I should be alone to improve myself, they give up the temporary pleasure of living with me continually for a great good which I hope will follow.

Perhaps it was with a subconscious idea of weaning him from Hunt that Haydon urged this retreat. Keats had had

a busy winter and it is also probable that he needed quiet and a change of scene. Added to the strain and worry of seeing his first volume of poems through the press, his friends had made many demands on his time. His mind, too, must have been straining at the leash for it had long been haunted by that old bright tale of the Moon-goddess and Endymion: now his old work was behind him, fixed in print, he must go forward to a new trial of strength. A long poem he felt to be a test of his powers and a means of growth. Hunt tried to dissuade him, feeling perhaps that he had not yet the formative power to shape a long work.

It was natural that the story of Endymion should haunt Keats, strongly influenced as he was by the Elizabethans and by Shakespeare. The romantics, whether of the sixteenth or the nineteenth century, were bathed in the cold, bright beauty of the moon; she governed the restless tides of their minds. The theme of Endymion was a favourite one. As far back as 1815 Keats had already written the first lines of his poem. Henry Stephens tells us that one evening in the twilight the two students were sitting together, Stephens working and Keats wrapped in thought. Suddenly Keats interrupted Stephens with a line of poetry, 'A thing of beauty is a constant joy.'

"What think you of that, Stephens?"

"It has the true ring, but is wanting in some way," Stephens answered, going on with his work.

There was silence, broken only perhaps by the ticking of a clock, or the scratching of Stephen's quill. Then on the quiet air there broke the sound of those words which were to go echoing through the centuries:

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever

"What think you of that, Stephens?"

"That will live for ever."

Stephens's reply is a little too apt to have the ring of authenticity, but it is a dramatic touch that may well be forgiven in an elderly man who had looked upon genius in his youth.

Curiously enough the fine opening was abandoned by Keats in 'I stood tip-toe,' at first entitled 'Endymion,' but now he returned to it. It was taken with him, either in his head or on a shabby scrap of manuscript, when he set

out in April for the Isle of Wight. He took with him also seven precious pocket volumes of an edition of Shakespeare edited by Dr. Johnson and George Steevens which he had apparently just purchased, for in the two first volumes he has written 'April, 1817.'

He probably took coach at the Bell and Crown in Holborn at four o'clock in the afternoon. Amid the cries of ostlers, the stamping of the horses, the echoing of cheerful bustling sounds in the old galleried inn yard, he climbed on to the top to his perilous uneasy seat. The outside benches were hard and narrow and there was no adequate rail to keep the passengers from falling off if the coach lurched into a rut. Happily the coach roads were well kept in 1817: when they bowled off with a crack of the whip and a winding of the horn the going would be good and exhilarating in the cool spring air. He would pass up Oxford Street and out of London through the toll-gate at Hyde Park Corner. London was then called 'the Hundred-gated' and tolls were frequent annoyances. There was little building beyond Knights-bridge; the coach would soon be out on the open road, leaving the smoking town behind.

It was early in the season and the coach was not full. After three stages Keats began to feel cold and went inside. Here is his own picture of the journey sent in a letter to his brothers from Southampton.

I did not know the Names of any of the Towns I passed through all I can tell you is that sometimes I saw dusty Hedges sometimes Ponds—then nothing—then a little Wood with trees look you like Launce's Sister "as white as a Lilly and as small as a Wand"—then came houses which died away into a few straggling Barns then came hedge trees aforesaid again. As the Lamp light crept along the following things were discovered. "long heath brown furze"—Hurdles here and there half a Mile—Park palings when the Windows of a House were always discovered by reflection—One Nymph of Fountain N.B. *Stone*—lopped Trees—Cow ruminating—ditto Donkey—Man and Woman going gingerly along—William seeing his Sisters over the Heath—John waiting with a Lanthorn for his Mistress—Barbers Pole—Docter's Shop—However after having had my fill of these I popped my Head out just as it began to Dawn—N.B. *this tuesday Morn saw the Sun rise*—of which I shall say nothing at present . . . from dawn to half past six I went through a most delightful Country—some open Down but for the most

part thickly wooded. What surprised me most was an immense quantity of blooming Furze on each side the road cutting a most rural dash. . . .

That morning at breakfast in the inn at Southampton he felt lonely so he 'went and unboxed a Shakespeare.' It was probably *The Tempest* (the first play in Volume I) that he read over his solitary meal for he wrote to his brothers, 'Here's my Comfort.' Shakespeare was ever his warming draught, his pleasure and a source of spiritual strength; his letters are full of Shakespearean quotations and allusions. After breakfast he went down to Southampton Water to inquire about the boat to the Island. As the water was low the boat could not sail until three o'clock in the afternoon. He wrote his letter to his brothers and, as he did not see much of the town, must have read or rested before he took his mid-day meal. He was thinking about his brothers and friends. He wrote :

You Haydon, Reynolds &c have been pushing each other out of my Brain by turns—I have conned over every Head in Haydon's Picture—you must warn them not to be afraid should my Ghost visit them on Wednesday—tell Haydon to Kiss his Hand at Betty over the Way for me yea and to spy at her for me—

He sent his love to the Misses Reynolds and to Fanny 'who I hope you will soon see. Write to me soon about them all—'

The crossing of the sixteen miles to Cowes would depend on the winds. Sometimes it took a mere two hours, sometimes a good part of the day. In a diary of the period one hour and three minutes is recorded as a triumphant record for the crossing. This is only three minutes over the scheduled time for the modern paddle-wheel steamers. He went to Newport and stayed the night there. The next day he went on to Carisbrooke in the centre of the Island. He wrote to Reynolds :

On the road from Cowes to Newport I saw some extensive Barracks which disgusted me extremely with Government for placing such a Nest of Debauchery in so beautiful a place—I asked a man on the coach about this—and he said that the people had been spoiled—In the room where I slept at Newport I found this on the Window "O Isle spoilt by the Milatary!" I must in honesty however

confess that I did not feel very sorry at the idea of the Women being a little profligate—

The barracks had been built there during the wars as a depot for recruits. They had previously been at Chatham, but the poor wretches, pressed or snared into the Army, had escaped up to London and hidden themselves in the narrow lanes and courts of the City.

‘I did not feel very sorry at the idea of the Women being a little profligate. . . .’ These were the coarse, full-blooded times of the Georges when men were expected before marriage to ‘sow their wild oats.’ Although we have among Keats’s fugitive verses a few erotic poems, such as ‘Unfelt, unheard, unseen’ and ‘Sharing Eve’s Apple’ we have no evidence that he favoured the company of loose women. This expression of a prevalent attitude to working women may have been boyish bravado, an attempt to appear man-of-the-worldish in the eyes of Reynolds, but ‘Sharing Eve’s Apple,’ though so delicately licentious as not to be offensive, certainly has an authentic ring as if it were the outcome of a sexual experience. Keats was, after all, young and a flesh-and-blood man but it is safe to say that he led a pure life and, by the standards of his time, a singularly pure one.

He was drawn by the beauty of Shanklin, by the sea and the wild wooded grandeur of the Chine: but Shanklin was a more expensive place. It was becoming the fashion among the rich and idle to ‘hunt,’ said Keats, ‘after the picturesque like beagles’ and to admire rhapsodically ‘romantic’ scenery. In comparing Keats with other travellers of the period it is noticeable how reticent he is in description of scenery. He makes no use of the catch-word ‘romantic.’ The beauty of nature was too close to his heart for easy expression; it was a truth in his inmost being which could only be blended into poetry. It was so with him in all things; where he felt deepest he could not speak directly. In his letters the little sister he loved is seldom mentioned or, later, the loss of his brothers. When he came to fall in love so deeply, the sweet and poignant grief was a secret to be jealously guarded.

Carisbrooke was a convenient centre for walking over the Island and near to Newport, where was the post office. Keats settled there at a Mrs. Cook’s, in the New Village, at what is now Canterbury House on the Castle Road. He probably

occupied a bedroom and the drawing-room on the first floor, from which he had a fine view of the ancient Keep of Carisbrooke Castle. From there he wrote to Reynolds :

. . . from here I can see your continent—from a little hill close by, the whole north Angle of the Isle of Wight, with the water between us. . . . I see Carisbrooke Castle from my window, and have found several delightful wood-alleys, and copses, and quick freshes. As for Primroses—the island ought to be called Primrose Island : that is, if the nation of Cowslips agree thereto, of which there are diverse Clans just beginning to lift up their heads and if an how the Rain holds whereby that is Birds eyes abate . . . I intend to walk over the Island east—West—North South—I have not seen many specimens of Ruins—I don't think however I shall ever see one to surpass Carisbrooke Castle. The trench is o'ergrown with the smoothest turf, and the Walls with ivy—The Keep within side is one Bower of ivy—a Colony of Jackdaws have been there many years. I dare say I have seen many a descendant of some old cawer who peeped through the Bars at Charles the first, when he was there in Confinement.

He was still thinking yearningly of his brothers and friends. He wanted Haydon to make for him sketches of Reynolds, Tom and George. That morning he tried to make the solitary lodging more home-like ; he arranged his books and 'pinned up Haydon—Mary Queen (of) Scotts, and Milton with his daughters in a row.' He found in the passage a print of Shakespeare which he hung over his books 'having first discarded a french Ambassador.' He was not sleeping well and was 'rather narvus.' The next day he wrote a sonnet which, he said, 'did me some good.' This he copied in his letter to Reynolds, prefacing it with 'the passage from Lear—  
"Do you not hear the sea?"—has haunted me intensely':

#### On the Sea

It keeps eternal Whisperings around  
Desolate shores, and with its mighty swell  
Gluts twice ten thousand Caverns ; till the spell  
Of Hecate leaves them their old shadowy sound.  
Often 'tis in such gentle temper found  
That scarcely will the very smallest shell  
Be moved for days from whence it sometime fell  
When last the winds of Heaven were unbound.

O ye who have your eyeballs vext and tir'd  
 Feast them upon the wideness of the Sea  
 O ye whose Ears are din'd with uproar rude  
 Or fed too much with cloying melody—  
 Sit ye near some old Cavern's Mouth and brood  
 Until ye start as if the Sea Nymphs quired—

Perhaps at Luccombe near Shanklin he had entered the great cave and, from its dark depths, seen the vast ocean anew, a rock-framed picture, an immensity brought down to an epitome within man's comprehension. It is possible that the very line itself, the haunting line from *King Lear*, 'Do you not hear the sea?' had come to him, consciously or subconsciously, from an Island experience. Shakespeare's description of the high Dover cliff and

. . . half way down  
 Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade!

occur only a few lines from 'Do you not hear the sea?' Samphire was until about fifty years ago brought regularly into Newport market from the southern parts of the Island. If Keats walked along the shore to the Culver he might have shuddered to see, half-way down the precipitous chalk cliff, a swaying, hunched figure. Men hazarded their lives for a miserable pittance in the 'dreadful trade,' or trades, of gathering samphire and capturing nesting sea-birds for the down-feathers by sitting astride a piece of wood suspended by a rope which they manipulated themselves, letting it slip over an iron crowbar driven in at the summit. Less than a month later we find Keats at Margate, where again the white cliffs rear, writing to Haydon: 'I am "one that gathers Samphire dreadful trade," the Cliff of Poesy Towers above me—'

He was now reading Shakespeare in his loneliness with passionate attention. He says to Reynolds that 'twould be a parlous good thing' if he were to receive a letter from him and from his brothers on Shakespeare's birthday.

Whenever you write a line say a Word or two on some Passage in Shakespeare that may have come rather new to you; which must be continually happening, notwithstanding that we read the same Play forty times—for instance, the following, from the *Tempest*, never struck me so forcibly as at present,

"Urchins  
*Shall, for that vast of Night that they may work,*  
 All exercise on thee—"



How can I help bringing to your mind the Line—

*In the dark backward and abyssm of time.*

I find I cannot exist without poetry—without eternal poetry—half the day will not do—the whole of it—I began with a little, but habit has made me a Leviathan—I had become all in a Tremble from not having written any thing of late—the Sonnet over leaf did me some good. I slept the better last night for it—this Morning, however, I am nearly as bad again—Just now I opened Spencer, and the first lines I saw were these—

“The noble Heart that harbors virtuous thought,  
And is with Child of glorious great intent,  
Can never rest, until it forth have brought  
Th’ eternal Brood of Glory excellent—”

Solitude on the lovely island, with a weight of beauty and poesy a heavy though a sweet burden, was not long to be borne. He had been expecting that Reynolds would join him later: perhaps it was an intimation that this was not possible added to a conviction, or fancy, that he could not get wholesome food on the island that made him finally decide to leave.

Mrs. Cook, the landlady, must have been a good-natured woman; she does not seem to have resented either the displacement of her pictures or the sudden departure of her lodger after a stay of only a week. She had evidently succumbed to his charm. She presented him with the portrait of Shakespeare he had hung up over his books which came, he said, ‘nearer to my idea of him than any I have seen.’ This delighted him and he felt it to be a good omen.

The journey to Margate must have been a tedious one unless he took a chaise; but this was an expensive way of travelling. A modern journey along the South Coast, taking a series of slow local trains that never seem to coincide, is tiresome enough but to do this disjointed journey by coach must have been far worse.

The change from the lush, hilly Island to the flat arid cliffs of Thanet was drastic, but Margate, ‘that treeless affair,’ is at its best in May or early June and the breezes blow keen and healthful. There was his old love, the sea; a grayer turbulent sea but with the sun rising and setting over its heaving surfaces and the moon making a long glistening white

track across it at night. And he was no longer 'obliged to be in a continual burning of thought,' of solitary thought, for Tom was now with him; Tom who understood him best. He had come from his island sojourn in a mood very like despair. He had asked himself:

Why I should be a Poet more than other Men,—seeing how great a thing it is. . . . What a thing to be in the Mouth of Fame—that at last the Idea has grown so monstrously beyond my seeming Power of attainment that the other day I nearly consented with myself to drop into a Phaeton—yet 'tis a disgrace to fail even in a huge attempt, and at this moment I drive the thought from me. . . . These last two days . . . I have felt more confident.

He is reading and writing most of the day in a mood humble yet splendidly arrogant. 'I am "one that gathers Samphire dreadful trade" the Cliff of Poesy Towers above me—yet when Tom who meets with some of Pope's Homer in Plutarch's Lives reads some of those to me they seem like Mice to mine.'

On May 11th Haydon wrote warning him against Hunt:

I love you like my own Brother, beware for God's sake of the delusions and sophistications that is ripping up the talent and respectability of our Friend—he will go out of the World the victim of his own weakness & the dupe of his own self delusions—with the contempt of his enemies and sorrow of his Friends—the cause he undertook to support injured by his own neglect of character—his family disordered, his children neglected, himself, petted and his prospects ruined!

Keats should preserve this letter for one day he would see the prophecy fulfilled. The passage is magnificently ironic, for Hunt, though he had a chequered and difficult life, lived to an honoured old age whereas poor Haydon at sixty, in debt and ultimately a failure, committed suicide.

When Keats replied he admitted Hunt's self-delusions and agreed that he must come to a sad end. 'There is no greater Sin after the 7 deadly than to flatter oneself into an idea of being a great Poet—'

Haydon had in his letter exhorted Keats in the moods of doubt and depression arising out of his (self-styled) 'horrid morbidity of temperament' to '*Trust to God*' and to pray

to Him for strength. Keats does not reply to this directly but says: 'I never quite despair and I read Shakespeare—indeed I shall I think never read any other Book much— . . I am very near Agreeing with Hazlitt that Shakespeare is enough for us— . .' He tells Haydon of an experience:

. . . you had notions of a good Genius presiding over you. I have of late had the same thought—for things which I do half at Random are afterwards confirmed by my judgment in a dozen features of Propriety. Is it too daring to Fancy Shakespeare this Presidor?

The subconscious mind works for the artist absorbing and making in its own mysterious depths. Most creative writers have the astonishment of this experience and it has at times a strong feeling of inspiration, of an outside influence.

Keats had heard from George that 'Money Troubles are to follow us up for some time to come perhaps for always—these vexations are a great hindrance to one,' a minor but irritating annoyance, 'rather like a nettle leaf or two in your bed.' The exact cause of this shortage of money will never be known unless Abbey's books should one day come to light. From Sir Sidney Colvin's investigations into the proceedings brought later by Charles Dilke in order to wrest Fanny Keats's money out of the hands of Abbey, it would appear that Abbey either muddled their finances or deliberately withheld money, but of this there can be no certainty without a fuller account. The brothers seem to have had a capital of fifteen hundred pounds each but Keats's medical training and Tom's ill-health considerably diminished it. Abbey had naturally expected that Keats would by now be self-supporting. It is probable that George was at this time out of employment. We do not know why he left Abbey, though there are hints in Keats's letters that the junior partner, Hodgkinson, was overbearing with him. The distance of Hampstead from Pancras Lane is no proof that George had ceased to work there. The daily coach fare of two shillings would be beyond a slender purse but no wage-earner of that period would have considered the walk to the City unduly long. When John Taylor, the publisher, was temporarily living at the Spaniard's Inn he walked regularly between Hampstead and Fleet Street.

Whatever the cause of the financial situation of the brothers, we find Keats glad to receive an advance of twenty pounds from his publishers and, early in June, asking reluctantly and in a falsely jocular tone for more money to settle up with a 'Couple of Duns.' It was not to the Olliers that he wrote but to his new publishers, John Taylor and James Augustus Hessey of 93 Fleet Street. These men were young publishers of vision, ready to welcome new talent and willing to risk their limited capital on works of originality. There are several men who might have introduced Keats to Taylor and Hessey; Woodhouse, reader probably in an unofficial capacity to the firm, or Reynolds for whom they had published, are the most likely.

Taylor was the moving spirit; a dabbler in poetry himself and a writer of pamphlets. He lived over the premises keeping in close touch with literary men who had, after the pleasant manner of the time, the freedom of the place. Hessey seems to have been responsible for the routine of the business, handling the ledger-books and running the retail side. Publishing and bookselling were not yet distinct trades; most publishers sold books, old and new. Taylor and Hessey's shop was a pleasant haunt. There are fine portraits of the two partners in Mr. Blunden's book on Taylor, *Keats's Publisher*.

Taylor's first contact with Keats both astonished and amused him. The young poet at this time affected 'a singular style of dress.' We know that he had long hair and wore the open-necked shirt which was the mark of an advanced liberal, but this might not have been enough to startle Taylor. Reynell, the printer, who met Keats in or about 1817, thought he was wearing 'some sort of sailor costume.' Perhaps Keats came to interview his prospective publisher in loose, light trousers and jacket similar to those worn by many of the common seamen of the time. This would have looked singular enough in the days of tight clothes and swallow-tailed coats. Later Keats's commonsense led him to drop an eccentricity in dress and to cut his hair.

Taylor was no whit discouraged by the failure of the 1817 volume. He wrote to his father on the very day that Keats arrived in the Isle of Wight, 'I cannot think he will fail to become a great Poet, though I agree with you in finding

much fault with the Dedication etc. 'These are not likely to appear in any other of his Productions.'

On May 16th Keats and his brother moved across to Canterbury, 'having got tired of Margate—I was not right in my head when I came.' We have no record of their stay in that ancient city. Keats hoped it would stimulate him to further exertion for he had been feeling stale, 'all the effects of a Mental Debauch—lowness of Spirits.' At Canterbury the remembrance of Chaucer was to set him forward 'like a Billiard-ball.' This lively image is perhaps strengthened by a statement of his recorded by Woodhouse that he could conceive that a billiard-ball 'may have a sense of delight from its own roundness, smoothness and volubility and the rapidity of its motion.' He could only have considered the hampering shortness of money a temporary one as he had 'some idea of seeing the Continent some time in the Summer.'

From Canterbury he went on alone to Hastings. He stayed at the village of Bo-Peep (now St. Leonard's) but probably joined in some of the frivolities of the fashionable watering-place. We know that he flirted with a lady whom later he was to meet again in London. By September he was among the old grey buildings and dreaming spires of Oxford with Benjamin Bailey who, charmed with him when he had met him in Town, had given him an invitation. From there on the 5th he wrote to Jane and Marianne Reynolds at Littlehampton one of his wildest letters. It is amusingly inconsequent, ridiculous hyperbole. I should like to give it in full, but it is not possible to quote all the delightful letters Keats wrote. An excerpt from it would spoil the humour and the shape of the whole : in a minor way it is as genuinely a work of art as a wrought poem.

With Bailey he was tranquilly happy in an atmosphere of lovely tradition and of books. His friend was putting in hours of close study for his examination. Keats, undisturbed by his presence, would sit near, at work upon the third book of *Endymion*. Bailey was astonished at the ease with which he wrote a regular fifty lines a day. 'Sometimes he fell short of his allotted task, but not often : and he would make it up another day. But he never forced himself.' He usually read aloud what he had written to his friend and then quietly turned to a book or wrote letters until Bailey was ready to go

out. September was a beautiful month that year and the river, the delight of running water, was there for Keats. On the 21st he wrote to Reynolds :

For these last five or six days we have had regularly a Boat on the Isis, and explored all the streams about, which are more in number than your eye lashes. We sometimes skim into a Bed of rushes, and there become naturalized riverfolks,—there is one particularly nice nest which we have christened “Reynolds’s Cove,” in which we have read Wordsworth and talked as may be.

Bailey was a devout admirer of Wordsworth with whom he had some little personal acquaintance. They ‘often talked of that noble passage in the lines on “Tintern Abbey” :

That blessed mood  
In which *the burthen of the mystery*,  
In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world,  
Is lightened.

‘Tintern Abbey’ was to the young romantics of 1817, together with passages in ‘The Excursion,’ an expression of a prevailing mood or attitude to life ; it was a poem as vital and important as *The Waste Land* was to our own post-war generation.

They talked of Chatterton whom Keats ardently admired and to the memory of whom he dedicated *Endymion*. Bailey records that the line ‘Come with acorn cup and thorn’ possessed a great charm for Keats. On these golden September afternoons amid the bird-haunted reeds and rushes they filled their minds with poetry. After a consideration of a fine passage, especially in one of the older poets. Keats would say in gentle under-tone “It’s nice.” He expressed particular admiration for the lines given to Ulysses in Act III of *Troilus and Cressida* :

Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,  
Wherein he puts alms for oblivion,  
A great-sized monster of ingratitude :  
Those scraps are good deeds past, which are devour’d  
As fast as they are made, forgot as soon :  
As done.

‘It was,’ he thought, ‘pregnant with practical wisdom, such as Shakespeare alone could produce.’ Of Keats himself

Bailey said, 'his common sense was a conspicuous part of his character.'

They discussed melody in poetry and Keats expounded to Bailey his theory as to the proper arrangement of open and closed vowels; the theory he put so magnificently into practice. 'No one else,' said Matthew Arnold, 'save Shakespeare, has in expression quite the fascinating felicity of Keats, his perfection of loveliness.' Keats was acutely sensitive to melody in music. Charlotte Reynolds has recorded that, although he had no knowledge, practical or theoretical, he was so sensitive to proper execution that when a wrong note had been played in a public performance, he had been known to say that he would like to 'go down into the orchestra and smash all the fiddles.' The standard of performance was in his time deplorably low. He himself said he felt that, if he had studied music, he could have shewn as much originality as in his poetry.

He wrote on September 14th to Jane Reynolds in praise of Bailey :

Poor Bailey scarcely ever well has gone to bed very so so, and pleased that I am writing to you. To your Brother John (whom henceforth I shall consider as mine) and to you my dear friends Marriann and Jane I shall ever feel grateful for having made known to me so real a fellow as Bailey. He delights me in the Selfish and (please God) the disinterested part of my disposition. If the old Poets have any pleasure in looking down at the Enjoyers of their works, their eyes must bend with double satisfaction upon him—I sit as at a feast when he is over them and pray that if after my death any of my Labours should be worthy saving, they may have as "honest a Chronicler" as Bailey. Out of this his Enthusiasm in his own pursuit and for all good things is of an exalted kind—worthy a more healthful frame and an untorn Spirit. He must have happy years to come—he shall not die by God—

'Endymion and I,' he said, 'are at the bottom of the Sea.'

From Oxford he wrote the first of his delightful letters to his sister, Frances Mary, who was kept very strictly by the Abbess at Walthamstow. She was now fourteen. When she was over eighty she wrote to H. Buxton Forman :

I seldom saw my Brothers more than for short visits three or four times a year. I was frequently invited during the vacations, by the

Dilke's, Reynolds, Wylie's and other friends of my brothers ; but my guardian Mr. Abbey was *too* careful of me, and always kept me a complete prisoner having no other acquaintances than my books, birds and flowers . . . my holydays were spent between the two houses of my Guardians.

From one visit to John Sandell, her second guardian, she came home with this curious little document (now in the Keats Museum) :

This is to Certify to whom it may concern, that Frances Mary Keats during the time she was on a Visit to Mr. Sandell, was a very good Girl.

J. S. 14 Jany. 1816.

If this were not a mere joke between the Abbeyes and the Sandells it would suggest that Fanny was held in with the severity only too common in those days. We know that she was not happy at Walthamstow. It is, however, only fair to the Abbeyes to say that they may have felt themselves morally obliged to keep Fanny away from her brothers and their friends. Abbey was probably a staunch old Tory, as were most of the older and more prosperous business men. They could remember the horrors and the loss of property in the French Revolution and felt that the reformers were advocating the overthrow of a stable Government for possible anarchy. Keats had publicly avowed himself to be a friend of that dangerous Jacobinical editor of *The Examiner*. The Tories were only too ready to ascribe a looseness of moral and social conduct to the Radicals : Fanny's brothers and their associates might be doubtful company for a young girl. Later, much against his inclination, Abbey did allow her to pay a few visits to Keats's friends.

Keats's letters to his sister are written with loving care and with a laudable restraint on his natural eccentricities of spelling. Tentatively, since he knew so little of her, he tried to interest her and to share in her young life. The first letter we have is dated September 10th :

My dear Fanny,

Let us now begin a regular question and answer—a little pro and con ; letting it interfere as a pleasant method of my coming at your favourite little wants and enjoyments, that I may meet them in a way befitting a brother.



We have been so little together since you have been able to reflect on things that I know not whether you prefer the History of King Pepin to Bunyan's Pilgrims Progress—or Cinderella and her glass slipper to Moor's Almanack. However in a few Letters I hope I shall be able to come at that and adapt my scribblings to your Pleasure. You must tell me about all you read if it be only six Pages in a week—and this transmitted to me every now and then will procure you full sheets of Writing from me pretty frequently—This this I feel as a necessity : for we ought to become intimately acquainted, in order that I may not only, as you grow up love you as my only Sister, but confide in you as my dearest friend.

He told her in brief the story of Endymion, adding :

but I dare say you have read this and all the other beautiful Tales which have come down from the ancient times of that beautiful Greece. If you have not let me know and I will tell you more at large of others quite as delightful.

He then talked of Oxford and of Paris where George and Tom were on holiday. He asked her whether she liked Miss Taylor's *Essays in Rhyme* : he remembered hearing her say that she liked *Original Poems for Infant Minds* by the same author. Afterwards he sent her a copy of the *Essays*. This was a publication of Taylor and Hessey's which he had probably noticed in that favourite haunt of his, their book-shop. He then (regrettably to lovers of the language) disparaged the French tongue :

you will be astonished to find how very inferior it is to our native Speech—I wish the Italian would supersede french in every School throughout the Country for that is full of real Poetry and Romance of a kind more fitted for the Pleasure of Ladies than perhaps our own—It seems that the only end to be gained in acquiring french is the immense accomplishment of speaking it—it is none at all—a most lamentable mistake indeed. Italian indeed would sound most musically from Lips which had begun to pronounce it as early as french is cramne'd down our Mouths, as if we were young Jackdaws at the mercy of an overfeeding Schoolboy.

He ended his letter :

Now Fanny you must write soon—and write all you think about, never mind what—only let me have a good deal of your writing—You need not do it all at once—be two or three or four days about it, and let it be a diary of your little Life. You will preserve all

my Letters and I will secure yours—and thus in the course of time we shall each of us have a good Bundle—which, hereafter, when things may have strangely altered and god knows what happened, we may read over together and look with pleasure on times past—that now are to come. Give my Respects to the Ladies—and so my dear Fanny I am ever

Your most affectionate Brother

John.

This letter was addressed to Miss Caley's school where she lived during term-time.

In her solitude among uncongenial strangers Fanny cherished an adoration for her eldest brother. She kept his letters as he had directed to the end of her long life, carrying them with her wherever she went. In 1877 she wrote: 'My enthusiasm and admiration of my dear brother are so strong in me at this moment, as when the blood of youth flowed in my veins.'

On September 17th Haydon wrote asking Keats to make some enquiries about a young man whom on a recent visit to Oxford he had found copying the altar-piece at Magdalen. If he showed promise Haydon was willing, provided his fare to London was paid and his support guaranteed for a year, to instruct him for nothing. If Haydon was a poor painter he was a born teacher and would do much for love for a genuine artist. Keats found the young man, Charles Cripps, and reported to Haydon that he had 'a great idea that he will be a tolerable neat brush.' Bailey and he thought the money side could be managed, although Cripps himself 'does not possess the Philosophers stone—nor Fortunatus' purse, nor Gyges' ring.'

After making this offer Haydon seems to have been rather more obstructive than helpful in the matter; Keats on his return to London made an effort to collect the money but found it both tiresome and difficult. As Cripps is not among the known pupils of Haydon it seems likely that he was not successful. Bailey, whose sympathy Haydon had enlisted, wrote to him about Cripps and received a rude reply on which Keats commented:

To a Man of your nature such a Letter as Haydon's must have been extremely cutting. . . . As soon as I had known Haydon

three days I had got enough of his character not to have been surprised at such a Letter as he has hurt you with. Nor when I knew it was it a principle with me to drop his acquaintance although with you it would have been an imperious feeling.

It was this intuitive knowledge of character, added to generosity of mind and a sense of humour, that enabled Keats to continue until his death on peaceful terms with his many friends, although they themselves were at times far from harmonious. Indeed, it seems as if Keats were a soothing power among them, a pleasant link. It is noticeable that when he went out of London they began to disagree. This too was painfully apparent after his death.

On October 2nd, he went with Bailey to Stratford-on-Avon for the day. This visit gave him an immense pleasure although he was repelled by the commercialisation of Shakespeare's birthplace; he must have been hurt by the greedy grabbing of money on this hallowed site.

Back at Hampstead, Keats wrote to Bailey on October 8th :

—every Body seems at Loggerheads. There's Hunt infatuated—there's Haydon's picture in statu quo. There's Hunt walks up and down his painting room criticising every head most unmercifully. There's Horace Smith tired of Hunt. The web of our Life is of mingled Yarn." . . . I am quite disgusted with literary Men—and will never know another except Wordsworth—no not even Byron. Here is an instance of the friendships of such. Haydon and Hunt have known each other many years—now they live pour ainsi dire jealous neighbours. Haydon says to me Keats dont show your Lines to Hunt on any account or he will have done half for you—so it appears Hunt wishes it to be thought.

Hunt and Haydon were now living near one another in Lisson Grove.

Keats was himself feeling irritated with Hunt who, meeting Reynolds at the theatre and hearing that Keats had nearly completed the four thousand lines he had set himself for the length of *Endymion*, said : " Ah, had it not been for me they would have been seven thousand ! " This was probably a light remark which would have been better not repeated but we know that Reynolds did not like Hunt. Keats was not too well and the remark rankled. He wrote :

You see Bailey how independant my writing has been—Hunts dissuasion (not to write a long poem) was of no avail—I refused to visit Shelley, that I might have my own unfettered Scope—and after all I shall have the Reputation of Hunt's elev  . His corrections and amputations will by the knowing ones be traced in the Poem. This is to be sure the vexation of a day—nor would I say so many Words about it to any but those whom I know to have my welfare and Reputation at Heart—

He was regretting the lovely peace of Magdalen Hall in vacation for 'Mrs. Bentley's children are making a horrid row.' Towards the end of the month he wrote again to congratulate Bailey on having obtained a curacy, tilting in the letter at Bailey's 'shocking bad hand.' 'Rome you know was not built in a day—I shall be able, by a little perseverance to read your Letters off hand.' On November 3rd he wrote again to condole with Bailey; there was some difficulty about his ordination in time to take up the curacy. The blame for the delay was apparently put upon the Bishop of Lincoln and Keats wrote with a truly Radical pen some pungent lines about the 'barefaced oppression and impertinence' of those high in office :

There is something so nauseous in self-willed yawning impudence in the shape of conscience—it sinks the Bishop of Lincoln into a smashed frog putrifying: that a rebel against common decency should escape the Pillory! That a Mitre should cover a Man guilty of the most coxcombical, tyrannical and indolent impertinence!

In this letter he mentioned the famous, or infamous attack on Hunt in Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine*, 'On the Cockney School of Poetry, No. 1.' He was afraid, from a reference to himself, that in the next issue they would directly attack him but hoped that any further attack might be prevented by a note put in the *Examiner* by John Hunt inviting 'Z,' the writer of the article, to send his address to the printer of the *Examiner* 'in order that justice may be executed on the proper person.'

By November 22nd Keats has gone into Surrey near Leatherhead in order to enjoy solitude and quiet in which to finish the last book of *Endymion*.

## CHAPTER X

### *At Burford Bridge (November–December, 1817)*

AT BURFORD BRIDGE, KEATS LODGED AT THE FOX AND Hounds, now the Burford Bridge Hotel. He was probably told about this quiet retreat by Hazlitt with whom it was a favourite. Hazlitt he met fairly frequently at Hunt's, Haydon's or the Reynoldses. He had a great respect and admiration for that singular man whose views very strongly influenced his own, but he does not seem ever to have become intimate with him. In the *Philosophy of Mystery* by Walter Cooper Dendy, there is an improbable conversation between Hazlitt and Keats which takes place on the top of Box Hill, but there is no proof that the two men ever did walk there together.

The hotel stands in a garden of two acres at the foot of the Hill, on the steep side of which the evergreens, firs, box and yews make a background darkly green and restful to look upon. In Keats's day the box and yews invaded the garden half-way across the lawn to the house. The bedroom shown as his looks out on to this lawn on which are fine trees he must have admired ; a beech and a Scotch cedar which was even then a full-grown tree. Near the window is a tall pine which may have delighted him in its tender youth. The garden was covered in a shrubbery, a tangle of nooks and 'Gothick' arbours that lured to the inn many newly married lovers.

The inn, on the old Portsmouth Road, has housed many famous people. Nelson spent his last night in England there, before the Battle of Trafalgar. Keats had the room next to the one he occupied ; this must have both pleased and interested him. He had retained his boyhood's interest in the hero. We find him at Teignmouth a few months later taking a copy of a letter written by Nelson.

In his marginal notes to *Paradise Lost*, against Book 1, lines 318-21, Keats wrote :

There is a cool pleasure in the very sound of vale. The English word is of the happiest chance. Milton has put vales in heaven and hell with the very utter affection and yearning of a great Poet. It is a sort of Delphic Abstraction—a beautiful thing made more beautiful by being reflected and put in a Mist. . . .

Was the valley of Mickleham at the back of his mind when he wrote this? There is a dream-like feeling about this vale of Avalon where the trees, unharried by winter winds, grow tall and shapely. Their interlacing twigs and boughs make gracious patterns against the dove-grey sky. The horizon is hid by the steeply sloping hills clothed darkly in evergreens and veiled in lingering mists. ' . . . a beautiful thing made more beautiful by being reflected and put in a Mist. . . . '

Through the valley there runs, slow and silent, the Mole choked by weeds and overflowing into the rich meadow in winter so that the trees are reflected long and shadowy in the dark water.

' I like this place very much,' wrote Keats. ' There is Hill & Dale and a little River—I went up Box hill this Evening after the Moon—you a' seen the Moon—came down—and wrote some lines.'

At Burford Bridge he was happy in busy solitude. Had he wished for talk he could have had it in plenty for living not far away was ' Conversation' Sharp, a man who attracted to the district men of thought and intellect, both Whig and Tory. He was accustomed to meet his friends at the inn. No doubt such a skilled and inveterate talker would not have despised the company of a young man of intellect in winter when visitors would be rarer. Hazlitt, in describing the inn to Keats, could hardly have omitted a reference to ' Conversation' Sharp.

Alone in Surrey Keats does not appear to have suffered from that yearning for family and friends he had felt in the Isle of Wight. His mind was fast maturing and he could more happily and with greater profit work alone and dream and think in solitude. His letters now gain both in richness of thought and expression. He had taken only three books with him and one of them was Shakespeare's Poems. He

was merging himself in Shakespeare ; feeling the beauty, the strength and the rightness of Shakespeare's perfect expression on his pulses. 'Shakespeare,' he said, 'has left nothing to say about nothing or anything. . . .' He decided to take

a poet's rage  
And stretched metre of an antique song

as the motto for his poem.

Very few letters written to Keats have survived: we must assume that he destroyed the greater number of them either on receipt or before he went to Italy. It is a matter of regret that we do not possess the other side of the correspondence with Reynolds and with Bailey during this rich middle period. Reynolds's keen mind would seem to have acted as a whetstone to Keats's more universal one, and Bailey, as 'man of feeling' and of principle, aroused in him a desire to explain, to defend his intuitions about life and poetry: so that in the letters to these two friends we see further into the workings of the poet's mind than in any others. It is, by the way, noticeable to a reader sensitive to the general feeling, the trend of a piece of writing, that to each of his friends Keats writes in a subtly different mood. With Reynolds he is intellectual, poetic but robust; with Bailey still intellectual but more emotional, more concerned with 'the holiness of the heart's affections'; with Haydon in the early period he is exalted, at once humble and arrogant with an occasional touch of something rather like hysteria; with Hunt, in the only two letters we have, he is lighter, more self-consciously whimsical.

But, happy as he was in his lovely solitude, he had taken anxieties with him. The first was Tom's ill-health, the danger of which he must, with his knowledge of medicine, have fully realised. The second was the minor worry of Cripps's future. But he was determined to be philosophical and wrote to Reynolds, who had worries of his own: 'Why don't you, as I do, look unconcernedly at what may be called more particularly Heart-vexations? They never surprise me—lord! a man should have the fine point of his soul taken off to become fit for this world.'

A letter written to Bailey on November 22nd is a rich one and must be largely quoted. After the passage given in the

last chapter about Haydon's character and the necessity of Bailey as 'man of principle' dropping him if he were his friend, Keats indirectly defended or explained his own tolerant attitude to Haydon and expounded certain of his views on poetry and life. These views must have been sufficiently startling to the young clergyman who we know, although he admired Wordsworth and much of the new poetry, disapproved of the new freedom of thought. In 1820 he wrote to Taylor :

(Keats) has good dispositions and noble qualities of heart ; but, I think, we shall accord in one conclusion that he has not kept the best society for one of his character and constitution. Many of his moral principles are consequently loose ; his moral conduct not very exact ; and the Phantom of Honour is substituted for the truth and substance of Religion.

In the light of our knowledge of Keats, his uprightness of soul and his delicacy of conduct, these statements look like mere slander. There was, perhaps, an element of spite in them for soon the trio of friendship, Reynolds, Rice and Bailey, was to be rudely split and Keats was afterwards reserved with him ; but in the main Bailey was only voicing the opinions of the majority of the old school about the dangerous reformers and radicals. The new school of poetry was in itself felt to be harmful error. In the eighteenth century there was a long struggle in the minds of the philosophers to reconcile poetry with Christianity and it was laid down that this end could only be achieved by the predominance of reason, the maintenance both in poetry and in the conduct of life of 'decorum,' of adherence to a definite code. The philosophers divorced imagination or 'fancy' from reason, or judgment, placing it in the heart and not in the head. 'Fancy leaps and frisks, and away she's gone ; whilst reason rattles the chain and follows after.' In a pamphlet published as late as 1805 John Foster asserted that a man's imagination will run away with his judgment or reason unless he has the aid of divine grace. Divine grace was to be sought within the established Church and the Church was so bound up with the State that the demands for reform from the new school of writers were held to be immoral.

In the following passage quoted from Keats's letter to



Bailey it must be born in mind that imagination was held to be an attribute of the heart :

I wish you knew all that I think about Genius and the Heart—and yet I think you are thoroughly acquainted with my innermost breast in that respect, or you could not have known me even thus long and still hold me worthy to be your dear friend. In passing however I must say of one thing that has pressed upon me lately and encreased my Humility and capability of submission and that is this truth—Men of Genius are great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect—but they have not any individuality, any determined Character—I would call the top and head of those who have a proper self Men of Power—

This would indeed be to one read in the eighteenth century philosophers and divines a subversive doctrine. The Popean man of genius was not to transform or disturb the tried notions of men of intellect but, as 'Man of Power,' to refine on and to interpret them. He was to attain to 'the grandeur of generality,' but not the generality, the universality in the truly classic sense but in the limited neo-classic meaning of the expression or clarification of the accepted views of a limited cultured class,

What oft is thought, but ne'er so well expressed.

Bailey as a young man familiar with the early romantics, an admirer of Wordsworth, would not entirely accept this neat but unnatural theory (indeed, many of the philosophers themselves were uneasy about it) but he had evidently been making some defence of it. Keats added :

O I wish I was as certain of the end of all your troubles as that of your momentary start about the authenticity of the Imagination. I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination—What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or not—for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty. . . . The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream—he awoke and found it truth. I am the more zealous in this affair, because I have never yet been able to perceive how any thing can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning—and yet it must be. Can it be that even the greatest Philosopher ever arrived at his goal without putting aside

numerous objections. However it may be, O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts! It is 'a Vision in the form of Youth' a Shadow of reality to come—and this consideration has further convinced me for it has come as an auxiliary to another favourite Speculation of mine, that we shall enjoy ourselves here after by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated. And yet such a fate can only befall those who delight in Sensation rather than hunger as you do after Truth. Adam's dream will do here and seems to be a conviction that Imagination and its empyreal reflection is the same as human Life and its Spiritual repetition. But as I was saying—the simple imaginative Mind may have its rewards in the repetition of its own silent Working coming continually on the Spirit with a fine Suddenness—to compare great things with small—have you never by being Surprised with an old Melody—in a delicious place—by a delicious voice, felt over again your very Speculations and Surmises at the time it first operated on your Soul—do you not remember forming to yourself the singer's face more beautiful than it was possible and yet with the elevation of the Moment you did not think so—even then you were mounted on the Wings of Imagination so high—that the Prototype must be here after—that delicious face you will see. What a time! I am continually running away from the subject—sure this cannot be exactly the case with a complex Mind—one that is imaginative and at the same time careful of its fruits—who would exist partly on Sensation partly on thought—to whom it is necessary that years should bring the philosophic Mind—such a one I consider your's and therefore it is necessary to your eternal Happiness that you not only drink this old Wine of Heaven, which I shall call the redigestion of our most ethereal Musings on Earth; but also increase in knowledge and know all things.

This is indeed heresy to neo-classicism. His young intuition in its early romanticism, by a swing of the pendulum, claimed too much for unrestrained imagination, but now he was groping after the true classicism, the highest poetry, as a fusion of thought and imagination; that poetry which is the highest philosophy, or love or God-guided wisdom.

It is only fair to Bailey to add that, although in 1820 he stated that many of Keats's moral principles were loose and 'the Phantom of Honour is substituted for the truth and substance of Religion,' in 1849 in writing to Lord Houghton, he said: 'he had a soul of utter integrity.' He was probably by then a wiser because an older and more

experienced man, and had learned to distinguish true character from the expression of opinions or 'principles,' which are, after all, largely a matter of fashion and of period. Also by 1849 the world had changed and changed in the direction of much that was dear to Keats and his friends.

There follows in Keats's letter a passage which, combined with a reference in a previous letter dated October 8th to the taking of mercury, led William Rossetti to the definite conclusion that Keats had contracted syphilis,

. . . but the world is full of troubles and I have not much reason to think myself pesterd with many—I think Jane or Marianne has a better opinion of me than I desire—for really and truly I do not think my Brothers illness connected with mine—you know more of the real Cause than they do nor have I any chance of being rack'd as you have been—

As Miss Lowell pointed out, in the first third of the nineteenth century the doctors were mercury-mad and prescribed mercury for all manner of diseases, including tuberculosis. It may be that Keats had a momentary fear that he, too, was developing the disease from which his mother died. But, the suggestion of syphilis once raised, this passage cannot be explained away by merely negative evidence. There is, I consider, one strong proof that Rossetti's assertion was unjustified; when Lord Houghton was collecting data from friends of Keats for the 'Life' Bailey sent him the letters of October 8th and November 22nd, and with permission to quote from them. Indeed, he suggested that Lord Houghton should make full use of the second letter. An examination of the passage given above makes it clear that if Keats had contracted syphilis so had Bailey: it seems highly improbable that Bailey, then Archdeacon of Colombo and the author of books upon religion, would risk such a revelation. Even though the fact might be only indirectly referred to, it is likely that he would, if he had suffered from that foul disease in his youth, have been self-conscious about the passage.

Keats then gave in his letter a piece of self-revelation not only interesting with regard to himself but also as to the artist temperament in general:

I scarcely remember counting upon any Happiness—I look not for it if it be not in the present hour—nothing startles me beyond the Moment. The setting Sun will always set me to rights—or if a Sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel.

This is an illustration of his dictum that ‘Men of Genius . . . have not any individuality, any determined Character.’ The power of the projection of the mind into other minds or extraneous objects, a projection which is strongly physical in feeling, is at once the joy and the penalty of the creative mind; the penalty because it is exhausting, and the joy because it enables the artist to live more happily in the moment than is possible to the ordinary man. Keats wrote :

Too many tears for lovers have been shed

Perhaps ‘poets’ or ‘writers’ could be substituted for lovers. Because the writer is vocal, because he can express himself he gives his sorrows to the world and so we pity him: but the inarticulate man in whom all emotion, all grief is bottled-up is the more to be pitied. And in giving voice to his grief or his worries the artist in some measure rids himself of them.

The process of assimilation and creation is in itself physically tiring, and Keats was not well. There had come upon him an exhaustion of spirit. There are distressing periods when the artist feels himself as dry as a sucked orange. Keats at the moment was experiencing this profitless mood :

The first thing that strikes me on hearing a Misfortune having befallen another is this. ‘Well it cannot be helped—he will have the pleasure of trying the resources of his spirit’—and I beg now my dear Bailey that hereafter should you observe any thing cold in me not to put it to the account of heartlessness but abstraction—for I assure you I sometimes feel not the influence of a Passion or affection during a whole week—and so long this sometimes continues I begin to suspect myself and the genuineness of my feelings at other times—thinking them a few barren Tragedy-tears—

Yet morally distressing as these dry periods are, there are moods in which a negation of feeling may seem by comparison

a happy state. Before he left Burford Bridge, in a country winter-bound, he wrote :

In drear-nighted December,  
 Too happy, happy Tree,  
 Thy branches ne'er remember  
 Their green felicity :  
 The north cannot undo them,  
 With a sleety whistle through them ;  
 Nor frozen thawings glue them  
 From budding at the prime.

In drear-nighted December,  
 Too happy, happy Brook,  
 Thy babbings ne'er remember  
 Apollo's summer look ;  
 But with a sweet forgetting,  
 They stay their crystal fretting,  
 Never, never petting  
 About the frozen time.

Ah ! would 'twere so with many  
 A gentle Girl and Boy !  
 But were there ever any  
 Writh'd not at passed joy ?  
 The feel of not to feel it,  
 When there is none to heal it,  
 Nor numbed sense to steel it,  
 Was never said in rhyme.

This poem was published after his death in varying versions ; the above is the one we have in his own handwriting. The model of the versification comes from a song in the *Spanish Fryar* and from this we know that he was already reading with attention Dryden's vigorous racy English.

He finished *Endymion* on November 28th. It must have been with a sigh of relief that he wrote the date opposite the last line. He had written the four thousand and fifty lines in less than six months, only exceeding his estimate of time by a month. He had said :

. . . let Autumn bold,  
 With universal tinge of sober gold,  
 Be all about me when I make an end.

But perhaps it was fitting that the poem should end in winter, for in contemplation of it he felt discontent and, with the

cold eye of self-criticism, ranked it as 'a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished.' By September 28th, when he had finished the third book, he had marked it down as a failure for he wrote to Haydon :

My Ideas with respect to it I assure you are very low—and I would write the subject thoroughly again—but I am tired of it and think the time would be better spent in writing a new Romance which I have in my eye for next Summer—Rome was not built in a Day—and all the good I expect from my employment this summer is the fruit of Experience which I hope to gather in my next Poem.

## CHAPTER XI

### *Theatrical Criticism ; Brown, Dilke and New Friends ; the Immortal Dinner (December, 1817-March, 1818)*

BEFORE DECEMBER 15TH KEATS WAS BACK AT HAMPSTEAD. George had taken Tom out of the rigour of a London winter to Teignmouth in Devon and he was alone in Well Walk. Reynolds was bound for Devon also, for he was now courting Eliza Powell Drewe. Keats agreed to take his place for a few weeks over the Christmas holidays as dramatic critic on *The Champion*.

The theatre was an old love and, although he professed a strong dislike for journalism, he must have enjoyed and welcomed the new experience, especially as Edmund Kean, then at the height of his powers, had now returned to Drury Lane after an absence of some weeks. On December 15th Keats saw him in his finest part, Richard III. On the 18th Kean played 'Luke' in a weak play called *Riches*. Keats was present in his official capacity but could muster up no interest in the play, and on Sunday, the 21st, there appeared in his journal, not a report of *Riches*, but a panegyric on Kean as Shakespearean actor. The performance of *Riches* was dismissed in a sentence: 'On Thursday evening he acted Luke in "*Riches*," as far as the stage will admit, to perfection.' The article is a fine piece of writing and interesting both as a contemporary view of a young enthusiast for the splendid herald of the new naturalistic school of acting and as a piece of self-revealing and imaginative prose. The style is perhaps too reminiscent of the admired Hazlitt and has not the ease and simplicity of the letters, but the sentences are clear, balanced and rhythmic. They are in the true rhythm of prose and not in the transferred poetic rhythm so often found in the prose of young poets. The article was printed by H. Buxton Forman in the *Complete Works* and is easily

accessible, together with the other *Champion* dramatic criticisms, in the small five volume edition. I give one of the most striking passages of 'Kean as Shakespearean Actor':

Amid his numerous excellencies, the one which at this moment most weighs upon us, is the elegance, gracefulness, and music of elocution. A melodious passage in poetry is full of pleasures both sensual and spiritual. The spiritual is felt when the very letters and points of characterised language show like the hieroglyphics of beauty; the mysterious signs of our immortal freemasonry! "A thing to dream of, not to tell!" The sensual life of verse springs warm from the lips of Kean, and to one learned in Shakespearian hieroglyphics—learned in the spiritual portion of those lines to which Kean adds a sensual grandeur; his tongue must seem to have robbed the Hybla bees and left them honeyless! There is an indescribable gusto in his voice, by which we feel that the utterer is thinking of the past and future while speaking of the instant. When he says in *Othello* "Put up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them," we feel that his throat had commanded where swords were as thick as reeds. From eternal risk, he speaks as though his body were unassailable. Again, his exclamation of "blood, blood, blood!" is direful and slaughterous to the deepest degree; the very words appear stained and gory. His nature hangs over them, making a prophetic repast. The voice is loosed on them, like the wild dog on the savage relics of an eastern conflict; and we can distinctly hear it "gorging and growling o'er carcase and limb." In *Richard*, "Be stirring with the lark to-morrow, gentle Norfolk!" comes from him, as through the morning atmosphere, towards which he yearns.

The next week he saw Kean in a curious hash called *Richard Duke of York*, a compilation from the three parts of *King Henry VI.* The mangling of Shakespeare was a common practice: Kean, perhaps the finest 'King Lear' of our stage, always played the tragedy with a happy ending. Keats's opinion was that

the play, as it is compressed, is most interesting, clear and vigorous. It bears us from the beginning to the middle of that tremendous struggle, and very properly stops at the death of the first of the Richards. . . . Perhaps the faults of the compilation are these:—First, the characters are too hastily introduced and despatched, and their language clipped too closely. . . . We see nothing of Talbot, and missing him is like walking among the Elgin Marbles



and seeing an empty place where the Theseus had reclined. In the next place the poetry is too much *modernized*. . . . The present play appears to go on by fits and starts, and to be made up too much of unmatchable events. It is inlaid with facts<sup>1</sup> of different colour, and we can see the cracks which the joiner's hand could not help leaving.

But on the whole the compilation deserved praise. 'Great ingenuity is displayed . . . the workings of Richard's mind are brought out as it were by the hand of the anatomist, and all the useless parts are cut away and laid aside.' He thought that Kean 'had a hand in it.' Actually Kean was responsible for a good deal of the compilation, if not for all of it. This Keats probably knew as a bit of theatre gossip; through Reynolds and others he was in a position to be tolerably acquainted with the back-stage life of the two patent theatres. He continued: 'But with all we fear the public will not take the obligation as it is meant, and as it ought to be received. The English people do not care one fig about Shakespeare,—only as he flatters their pride and their prejudices.'

The writing of this critique is, apart from some passages on Kean himself, pedestrian, though there are a few fine phrases, such as 'pelican strife' for the Wars of the Roses. The historical plays of Shakespeare are, he said:

. . . written with infinite vigour, but their regularity tied the hand of Shakespeare. Particular facts kept him in the high road, and would not suffer him to turn down leafy and winding lanes, or to break wildly and at once into the breathing fields. The poetry is for the most part ironed and manacled with a chain of facts, and cannot get free. . . . The poetry of Shakespeare is generally free as is the wind—a perfect thing of the elements, winged and sweetly coloured. Poetry must be free! It is of the air, not of the earth; and the higher it soars the nearer it gets to its home.

He spoke of the poetry of *Romeo and Juliet*, of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* as 'remaining . . . in all men's hearts a perpetual and golden dream. The poetry of "Lear," "Othello," "Cymbeline" &c., is the poetry of human passions and affections, made almost etherial by the power of the poet. . . .' The poetry of the historical dramas is 'often times poetry wandering on the

<sup>1</sup> A misprint for *facets*?

London Road.' But he was attacking his idol and felt uneasy. He threw down his pen and opened his Shakespeare. Coming at length back to his manuscript he continued: 'On going into the three parts of "Henry the Sixth" for themselves, we retract all dispraise and accusation, and declare them to be perfect works . . . we live again in the olden time. The Duke of York plucks the pale rose before our eyes. . . .' He gave himself the pleasure of quoting twenty lines of Warwick's fifth speech in Act III, scene 2 of the second part, beginning, 'Oft have I seen a timely-parted ghost.' Then, with a glance up, perhaps, at his treasured portrait of Shakespeare he wrote, 'we feel that criticism has no right to purse its little brow in the presence of Shakespeare.' He again praised the depth and feeling of Kean's acting especially in the death-scene:

His death was very great. But Kean always "dies as erring men do die." The bodily functions wither up, and the mental faculties hold out till they crack. It is an extinguishment, not a decay. The hand is agonized with death; the lip trembles with the last breath, as we see the autumn leaf thrill in the cold wind of evening. The very eye-lid dies. The acting of Kean is Shakespearian—he will fully understand what we mean.

I wonder if the great actor, bending his handsome brows over the *Champion* article, smiled understandingly at this line and, with the previous article in mind, had a fleeting desire to know the writer?

On January 1st Keats was at Covent Garden to see a new tragedy by John Dillon, *Retribution or the Chieftain's Daughter*. The play, he says, was 'most wretched; an unpardonable offence, so *sans pareilly*, so inferior to Mrs. Radcliffe, so german to a play-bill at a fair, that we will say no more about it for fear prejudice and indignation should carry us butt against the main body of the work to try whose skull is hardest.' The expression *sans pareilly* was apparently of his own coinage: the Sans Pareil was a minor theatre not licensed to play legitimate drama and afterwards called the Adelphi. It is interesting to see how this rough stuff in the form of melodrama (at first literally melo-drama to avoid by the introduction of songs and music infringement of the rights of the two patent theatres) survived at this house

well into our own times. Towards the end of the critique there is a characteristically kind note :

If the author is young and has a wide chasm to fill up with achievement, and at the same time gives up writing such common-place as we find in this his first trial, he need not care what is said for or against in the public prints.

Keats may have been told that the author was very young. This play was Dillon's first and last essay in the theatre. He soon afterwards embarked with more advantage to his pocket on a commercial career.

In the same number of *The Champion* there appeared an article by Keats based on the Drury Lane pantomime, *Don Giovanni*, which he probably saw on Boxing Night. He told his brothers it was 'a very nice one but badly acted.' In his article he made little more direct reference to the show itself than : 'As to the pantomime, be it good or bad, a child should write a critique upon it. We were pleased knowing how much better it ought to be—a child's is a eulogy—and that is not merely in pantomimes.' Don Juan does not seem a promising hero for a child's entertainment, but he was Harlequin : probably the story itself was only of the slightest. The pantomime of that period was primarily a harlequinade with clown and pantaloon as leading characters ; the harlequinade which, in the pantomimes enjoyed by children now middle-aged, had sadly dwindled down to a short epilogue.

Keats began his article by saying that for many years the subject of Don Juan had been done to death, 'wire-drawn' in the theatres, 'made a pet of at the Surrey, and fiddled away to hell at the Italian Opera.' It had now 'found its way into the Drury Lane pantomime.' Interest in the Don was characteristic of one aspect of the new movement in literature : the gross libertine was romanticised into a dark, sad soul in search of the ideal woman. That he should even appear, as ancient traditional harlequin, in a frivolous and purely popular pantomime is evidence of the wisdom of Byron in choosing him as putative hero of his poem.

Keats's article, though not in his happiest style, is amusing and of period interest. After dilating on the minute interest taken in the Don's private life he continues : 'In the course

of the pantomime Punch and Judy with their family were introduced: an illustrious house, of which the pranks and witty squeaking are more popular than Giovanni himself.' Punch and Judy's family? Was there then a legitimate addition to the historic Baby, or was Drury Lane tampering with tradition?

He then makes a solemn enquiry into the phenomenon of the greater popularity of the puppet hero:

In the first place if the Don is well made, Punch is ill made; if the Rake has a dozen mistresses, Punch has his Judy, who has the charms of a dozen in her summed up—if the former has a confident stamp, the latter has the neatest jerk of the left leg; if the former has his quizzing glass the latter has his ladle.

The ladle has now dwindled back into plain stick. Mr. Punch's ladle appears to have been a temporary fashion linking him with the beverage so frequently spooned out hot in Georgian parlours.

Keats now invented a few criticisms of Punch attributing them in thinly disguised names to well-known Shakespearean commentators. His gibes at the pretensions of these gentlemen were driven home by, 'to have a doubt of their vanity would be to take a hawk for a handsaw.' Curiously enough he does not include Dr. Johnson although his written comments on his notes in the Johnson and Steevens edition of Shakespeare are trenchant, and there are few comments on the notes by Steevens, whom he here pillories as 'Stephanio.'

The modern critic sits in the orchestra stalls; so most probably did Keats but in a more literal sense. The orchestra-well of those days extended in an oval shape far into the auditorium and the press, together with friends of the management, often had seats within it. Let us hope that Keats's sensitive ear was not too sharply affronted by the orchestra at such uncomfortably close quarters. Behind him would be the pit which extended right up to the orchestra-well; row upon row of fidgety people upon hard, narrow benches, consuming quantities of food and drink and considerably more vocal than a modern audience. Comments on the play and upon the actors were not kept back for quiet airing during the intervals or after the performance. To 'get the bird' was a phrase with a more literal meaning to the stage

of that day. There is a simile in *Hyperion* (Book I, line 253) which recalls these noisy evenings in the theatre :

For as in theatres of crowded men  
Hubbub increases more they call out 'Hush !'  
So at Hyperion's words the Phantoms pale  
Bestir'd themselves, thrice horrible and cold ;

It is from Keats's letters to his brothers that we know he wrote these articles in *The Champion*. He sent them the articles as they appeared, remarking of the one on *Retribution* that it was 'so badly punctuated that, as you perceive, I am determined never to write more without some care in that particular.' He also sent them on December 21st *The Examiner*, containing an account of the three days' trial of William Hone, the free-thinking publisher, for publishing 'impious, profane and scandalous libels.' His acquittal was hailed with triumph in Liberal circles. 'His *Not Guilty*,' wrote Keats, 'is a thing, which not to have been, would have dulled still more Liberty's Emblazoning.'

He tells them in the same letter that he 'had two very pleasant evenings with Dilke' and that 'Brown and Dilke walked with me and back from the Christmas pantomime.' He had been acquainted with Charles Wentworth Dilke for some time through the Reynoldses. Dilke, a clerk in the Navy Pay Office was, although only seven years older than Keats, already an established man of letters and the careful editor of some volumes supplementary to Dodsley's *Collection of Old Plays*. He and his friend Charles Brown had built themselves a double house, Wentworth Place, on the edge of Hampstead Heath to the south side. Dilke, a married man with a child, occupied the larger portion and Brown, a bachelor, lived in the smaller. Although a man of considerable mental powers, Dilke was curiously limited both in sympathies and intellect. Charles Lamb said there was a particular kind of blockhead, 'a *Dilkeish* blockhead.' Although a man of advanced Liberal ideas he put those ideas in a set of neat pigeon-holes and tried to apply them to illogical humanity. It was perhaps inevitable that he should be bitten by Godwin's theories and see human progress as an orderly advance to a mythical perfectability of humankind. He was, in Keats's own phrase, a 'Godwin-perfectability man.' In practical

affairs by virtue of his very inelasticity, he had a bull-dog grip on the matter in hand. Later when Fanny Keats's affairs were being either hopelessly muddled or dishonestly dealt with by Abbey he managed to wrest them from him, forcing the notoriously lax Court of Chancery to make him her guardian and trustee. But when a dispute arose over costs between two lawyers in connection with the trust he took umbrage, as one of them was a friend of his, and put her marriage-portion into Chancery. He had, said Fanny, 'a twist in his temper' and 'in a fit of ill-humour injured my interests rather seriously.' 'What was still more galling to me,' she added, 'and never to be forgotten, his sneering observations on the nervous irritability of my poor brother produced by ill-health, and a thousand unfortunate circumstances.' These unkindnesses to the girl would seem to have been the outcome of lack of imagination rather than of malice. There is no evidence that Keats was ever on anything but good terms with him, although towards the end he felt some irritation over his political views and was always a trifle annoyed at his over-fondness for his only child, Charley, who was that pest of visiting friends, a spoiled child.

As Keats walked back to Hampstead with the two men he had not a dispute but a disquisition, with Dilke on various subjects ; several things dove-tailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason—

One can imagine Dilke laying down the law in no uncertain tones and the young Keats eagerly questioning his dicta.' We do not hear what Brown said : perhaps that cautious man kept his own counsel.

Charles Brown was to become the closest friend of Keats, to take the place in intimacy of his brothers when they were no longer beside him. Brown was both Highland and Welsh by descent. Although to most men he was a good companion, his Celtic blood made him at times difficult for an Englishman to comprehend. He would take odd and unexplained dislikes and he was a fierce hater. He was both mean and generous.

In the words of Dilke, his friend, 'He was the most scrupulously honest man I ever knew—but wanted nobleness to lift this honesty out of the commercial kennel. . . . His sense of justice led him at times to do acts of generosity—at others of meanness—the latter was always noticed, the former overlooked—therefore among his early companions he had a character for anything rather than liberality—but he was liberal.' His early circumstances, which were remarkable, had probably accentuated in him that carefulness in the spending of money not always understood by the more careless Englishman. He had gone out to work at an early age but by the time he was eighteen had known both responsibility and prosperity. His brother John had made him a partner in his business and he managed a branch in St. Petersburg. In 1807 the Treaty of Tilsit, in which Russia secretly undertook to aid France in her commercial war against England, brought disaster to the firm. Brown returned to England ruined. For years he made a precarious living by journalism and was at one time so poor that he was forced to dine at a fourpenny 'ordinary' where the knives and forks were chained to the table. In 1814 he had a mild success in the theatre; he wrote the libretto of a serio-comic opera *Narensky, or the Road to Yaroslaf*, produced at Drury Lane with music by Braham and Reeve. Although it ran only for a few nights it brought him three hundred pounds and free admission to the theatre for life. Later his brother James died in the service of the East India Company and left him enough income to live upon with care. He still wrote but was freer to follow his own bent which was the writing of tales of wonder and Shakespearean commentary. His enthusiasm for Shakespeare made a mental bond with Keats. True to his blood he was fiercely loyal in friendship. The depth of his love for Keats has perhaps not been fully realised until recently when his memoir of the poet was, by the courtesy of Lord Crewe, made available to the public.<sup>1</sup> In appearance and largely in nature he was strong, solid and mundane, but he had enough imagination and humour to leaven these earthy qualities and to make him perhaps an ideal friend for Keats, to whom he was both sympathetic

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Keats*, by Charles Brown, edited by Dorothy Hyde Bedertha and Willard Bissell Pope, Oxford University Press, 1937.

and restful. He was thirty-one when he met Keats, but already bald and set in appearance.

The company of Dilke, his pleasant wife and Brown was doubly welcome to Keats living in solitary lodgings and he had only to walk down the hill from Well Walk to reach their homes. No doubt their well-stored bookshelves, the volumes of literature and of old plays, were an additional attraction. He spent more and more of his time with Dilke, sometimes taking his work along with him. He was now correcting and copying *Endymion* for the press. Tom down at Teignmouth was 'licking his chops' at the thought of early publication, but Keats warned him not to expect to see the volume too soon.

On December 19th he went to Town to see the aged Benjamin West's picture 'Death on a Pale Horse.' Of it he wrote :

It is a wonderful picture, when West's age is considered ; But there is nothing to be intense upon ; no women one feels mad to kiss, no face swelling into reality—The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth. Examine 'King Lear', and you will find this exemplified throughout ; but in this picture we have unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation excited, in which to bury its repulsiveness—

He was reading *King Lear* with close attention at this time in an 1808 reprint of the Folio. This book is now one of the treasures of the Keats Museum and in it *Lear* is heavily underlined throughout. Keats's intellect was rapidly maturing ; he was passing from a state of passiveness, a simple response to natural beauties, to a stronger grip on reality. In the seven little volumes he took with him to the Isle of Wight *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* are the most heavily marked ; *Hamlet* is a good deal underlined, but *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* are unmarked. He was now turning to the great tragedies, sagas of the human spirit, and in particular to the 'bitter-sweet' of *Lear*. On January 23rd he wrote to his brothers :

I think a little change has taken place in my intellect lately—I cannot bear to be uninterested or unemployed, I, who for so long



a time have been addicted to passiveness. Nothing is finer for the purposes of great productions than a very gradual ripening of the intellectual powers. As an instance of this—observe—I sat down yesterday to read “King Lear” once again the thing appeared to demand the prologue of a Sonnet, I wrote it and began to read—(I know you would like to see it.)

He then copied out for them in its first version ‘On sitting down to read King Lear once again.’ The sixth line stood as ‘Betwixt Hell torment and impassion’d Clay.’ He copied his final version (reproduced in Plate 9) into his folio on the blank space at the end of *Hamlet* facing the opening of *King Lear*.

The first line has a boldness and a subtlety of rhythm. It would have been easier and appeared safer to a second-rate poet to write the smoother line: ‘O golden-tongued Romance with Lute serene.’ He could have rimed it with ‘Queen.’ But how rich is the melody of the four opening lines:

O Golden-tongued Romance, with serene Lute !  
 Fair plumed Syren, Queen of far-away !  
 Leave melodizing on this wintry day  
 Shut up thine olden Pages, and be mute.

To most lovers of Shakespeare reading in folio is a joyous revelation; to Keats with a poet’s mind and supersensitive ear it brought an even greater measure of delight. Apart from a new enjoyment of the work of his master, nearer to him by reading in an edition so close to his own time, he brought to bear upon the text a strong critical attention. Comparing old and modern editions he suggested certain valuable emendations and criticised others. *King Lear* in folio is heavily marked and all Lear’s speeches are underscored. To Act I, scene 1, Goneril’s speech at line 291: ‘You see how full of changes his age is,’ he appended a note which Dr. Caroline Spurgeon rightly terms ‘a short prose poem’:

How finely is the brief of Lear’s character sketched in this conference—from this point does Shakespeare spur him out to the mighty grapple—“the seeded pride that hath to this maturity blowne up” Shakspeare doth scatter abroad on the winds of Passion, where the germs take buoyant root in stormy Air, suck lightning sap, and become voiced dragons—self-will and pride

and wrath are taken at a rebound by his giant hand and mounted to the Clouds—there to remain and thunder evermore.

A note and underlinings to what Keats called 'bye-writing' (the lines which are not high poetry but serve to carry forward the action of the play) show that he was already keenly interested in play-construction. To this period Lord Houghton assigned the extracts from an opera and that tantalising fragment of 'The Castle Builder' with its Browningsque opening :

To-night I'll have my friar—let me think  
About my room,—I'll have it in the pink ;  
It should be rich and sombre, and the moon,  
Just in its mid-life in the midst of June,  
Should look through four large windows and display  
Clear, but for gold-fish vases in the way,  
Their glassy diamonding on Turkish floor ;  
The tapers keep aside, an hour and more,  
To see what else the moon alone can show ;  
While the night-breeze doth softly let us know  
My terrace is well bower'd with oranges.

After a minute and pre-Raphaelitish description of the room ('It is a gorgeous room, but somewhat sad'), the fragment ends :

My wine—O good ! 'tis here at my desire,  
And I must sit to supper with my friar.

An ominous atmosphere is maintained throughout the speech ; it is full of dark vowels and blunt consonants with a hint of thunder and fateful lighting in the lines :

And opposite the stedfast eye doth meet  
A spacious looking-glass, upon whose face,  
In letters raven-sombre, you may trace  
Old ' Mene, Mene, Tekel Upharsin.'

A few more speeches from the projected play have come to light. 'The Castle Builder' is telling 'Bernadine' (presumably a monk or friar) that if he has got wisdom from 'Convent libraries' he himself has

. . . been carding  
A longer skein of wit in Convent Garden.

Bernadine shows an eager interest and the Castle Builder goes on :

Sir, Convent Garden is a monstrous beast  
 From morning, four o'clock, to twelve at noon,  
 It swallows cabbages without a spoon.  
 And then, from twelve to two, this Eden made is  
 A promenade for cooks and ancient ladies ;  
 And then for supper, 'stead of soup and poaches,  
 It swallows chairmen, damns, and Hackney coaches.  
 In short, Sir, 'tis a very place for monks,  
 For it containeth twenty thousand punks,  
 Which any man may number for his sport,  
 By following fat elbows up a court.

This is eighteenth-century Covent Garden in a nutshell. He had already achieved that essential in the art of a dramatist, the power of condensation. The description is clear, succinct, and calls up a complete and immediate picture in the mind of the hearer.

Almost certainly in the February of this year he wrote that sonnet which is more than Shakespearean ; it is an echo of Shakespeare's own voice, 'To a Lady seen for a few Moments at Vauxhall.'

Time's sea hath been five years at its slow ebb,  
 Long hours have to and fro let creep the sand,  
 Since I was tangled in thy beauty's web,  
 And snared by the ungloving of thine hand.  
 And yet I never look on midnight sky,  
 But I behold thine eyes' well memory'd light ;  
 I cannot look upon the rose's dye,  
 But to thy cheek my soul doth take its flight.  
 I cannot look on any budding flower,  
 But my fond ear, in fancy at thy lips  
 And hearkening for a love-sound, doth devour  
 Its sweets in the wrong sense :—Thou dost eclipse  
 Every delight with sweet remembering,  
 And grief unto my darling joys dost bring.

Woodhouse put February 4th against this poem. Copies of the poems in Keats's own handwriting often bear, not the date of composition, but that of a fair copying, but if the 4th were the date of composition on this day he wrote two sonnets. He told his brothers that 'The Wednesday before last' (February 4th) 'Shelley, Hunt and I wrote each a Sonnet on the River Nile. . . .' The three poems survived

and in the contest clearly the slighter poet won, though he had to sit up half the night to complete his sonnet.

February 19th was a warm sunny morning, a harbinger of spring. On a black winter bough a thrush was singing. The poet was shaken from his new activity, tempted by the halcyon day to idleness; but his idleness was fruitful. His mind strayed from nature to books, from books to nature and then turned in upon itself. The result of his meditation was a remarkable letter to Reynolds. At a risk of being overlengthy in quotation I feel I must give it in full: it is such a masterly shadowing-forth of a mood of the creative mind which is at once a source of strength and a snare.

I had an idea that a Man might pass a very pleasant life in this manner—let him on a certain day read a certain Page of full Poesy or distilled Prose, and let him wander with it, and muse upon it, and reflect upon it, and bring home to it, and prophesy upon it, and dream upon it, until it becomes stale—but when will it do so? Never. When Man has arrived at a certain ripeness in intellect any one grand and spiritual passage serves him as a starting-post towards all “the two-and-thirty Palaces”. How happy is such a voyage of conception, what delicious diligent Indolence! A doze upon a sofa does not hinder it, and a nap upon Clover engenders etherial finger-pointings—the prattle of a child gives it wings, and the converse of middle-age a strength to beat them—a strain of music conducts to “an odd angle of the Isle”, and when the leaves whisper it puts a girdle round the earth. Nor will this sparing touch of noble Books be any irreverence to their Writers—for perhaps the honors paid by Man to Man are trifles in comparison to the Benefit done by great Works to the Spirit and pulse of good by their mere passive existence. Memory should not be called knowledge.

Many have original minds who do not think it—they are led away by Custom. Now it appears to me that almost any Man may like the spider spin from his own inwards his own airy Citadel—the points of leaves and twigs on which the spider begins her work are few, and she fills the air with a beautiful circuiting. Man should be content with as few points to tip with the fine Web of his Soul, and weave a tapestry empyrean full of symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his wandering, of distinctness for his luxury. But the Minds of Mortals are so different and bent on such diverse journeys that it may at first appear impossible for any common taste and fellowship to exist between two or three under these suppositions. It is however

quite the contrary. Minds would leave each other in contrary directions, traverse each other in numberless points, and at last greet each other at the journey's end. An old Man and a child would talk together and the old Man be led on his path and the child left thinking.

Man should not dispute or assert but whisper results to his neighbour and thus by every germ of spirit sucking the sap from mould ethereal every human might become great, and Humanity instead of being a wide heath of Furze and Briars with here and there a remote Oak or Pine, would become a grand democracy of Forest Trees !

It has been an old comparison for our urging on—the Beehive ; however, it seems to me that we should rather be the flower than the Bee—for it is a false notion that more is gained by receiving than giving—no, the receiver and the giver are equal in their benefits. The flower, I doubt not, receives a fair guerdon from the Bee—its leaves blush deeper in the next spring—and who shall say between Man and Woman which is the most delighted ? Now it is more noble to sit like Jove than to fly like Mercury—let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey, bee-like buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be aimed at ; but let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive—budding patiently under the eye of Apollo and taking hints from every noble insect that favours us with a visit—sap will be given us for meat and dew for drink.

I was led into these thoughts, my dear Reynolds, by the beauty of the morning operating on a sense of Idleness—I have not read any Books—the Morning said I was right—I have no idea but of the morning, and the thrush said I was right—seeming to say,

O thou whose face hath felt the Winter's wind,  
Whose eye has seen the snow-clouds hung in mist,  
And the black elm-tops 'mong the freezing stars,  
To thee the Spring will be a harvest-time.  
O thou, whose only book has been the light  
Of supreme darkness which thou feddest on  
Night after night when Phœbus was away,  
To thee the Spring shall be a triple morn.  
O fret not after knowledge—I have none,  
And yet my song comes native with the warmth.  
O fret not after knowledge—I have none,  
And yet the Evening listens. He who saddens  
At thought of idleness cannot be idle,  
And he's awake who thinks himself asleep.

Now I am sensible all this is mere sophistication (however it may neighbour to any truths), to excuse my own indolence—so I will

not deceive myself that Man should be equal with Jove—but think himself very well off as a sort of scullion-Mercury, or even a humble Bee. It is no matter whether I am right or wrong, either one way or another, if there is sufficient to lift a little time from your shoulders.

The last phrase is probably a sly dig at his friend who was unlikely to be finding time heavy or slow down at Exeter.

H. Buxton Forman comments on the Thrush poem: 'Keats seems to have been really writing in a kind of spiritual parallelism with the thrush's song; it will be noted that line 5 repeats the form of line 1, line 8 of line 4, while lines 11 and 12 are a still closer repetition of lines 9 and 10; so that the poem follows in a sense the thrush's method of repetition . . . I think it hardly fantastic to suppose that he consciously translated the wild melody of the thrush into an unrhymed sonnet-structure.'

To this period, so rich in sonnets, there belongs the fine one to Homer:

Standing aloof in giant ignorance,  
Of thee I hear and of the Cyclades,  
As one who sits ashore and longs perchance  
To visit dolphin-coral in deep seas.  
So thou wast blind;—but then the veil was rent,  
For Jove uncurtain'd Heaven to let thee live,  
And Neptune made for thee a spumy tent,  
And Pan made sing for thee his forest-hive;  
Aye on the shores of darkness there is light,  
And precipices show untrodden green,  
There is a budding morrow in midnight,  
There is triple sight in blindness keen;  
Such seeing hadst thou, as it once befel  
To Dian, Queen of Earth, and Heaven, and Hell.

Rossetti considered the eleventh line to be one of the finest in all poetry. In 'There is a triple sight in blindness keen' Keats may have had Milton as well as Homer in mind. He was reading him with Dilke who was an enthusiast; and lately he had been startled into a new consciousness of him by seeing at Hunt's a lock of his bright hair. In his Milton Keats has appended the following note to Book I, lines 53 to 75 of *Paradise Lost*, where Satan in Hell rouses from his torpor and discovers the 'sights of woe' in 'darkness visible,'

One of the most mysterious of semi-speculations is, one would suppose, that of one Mind's imagining into another. Things may be described by a Man's self in parts so as to make a grand whole which that Man himself would scarcely inform to its excess. A Poet can seldom have justice done to his imagination—for men are as distinct in their conceptions of material shadowings as they are in matters of spiritual understanding: it can scarcely be conceived how Milton's *Blindness* might here aid the magnitude of his conceptions as a bat in a large gothic vault.

Incidentally, and showing Keats's dramatic perception, he comments on 'round he throws his baleful eyes,' 'nothing can be more impressive and shaded than the commencement of the action here—'

Keats was probably made more consciously critical at this time by hearing Hazlitt lecture on the English poets at the Surrey Institution. These lectures, gripping and stimulating to a reader must have been doubly so when the sublime sense and the brilliant paradox came winged from the man himself. He read in a strong level voice, his dark hair falling forward over his high, white forehead. From time to time he would fix the audience with his large eyes, mazed and defiant, to drive a point home.

He employed the keen edge of paradox to pierce the tough husk of the minds of his hearers, the majority of whom were Dissenters who agreed with him in his hatred of the existing Government, Quakers who approved of his advocacy of social reforms, and of homely folk who came to improve their minds; people to whom much of the matter he dealt with was either godless or unfamiliar—or both. To a large number of more receptive ears his modernity must have been both bewildering and offensive. One hearer more open to new voices, Crabb Robinson, he offended by his attacks on Wordsworth. Some who were open enemies of this truculent man came to sneer: a few friends and admirers listened with rapt attention, applauded and agreed. Keats himself placed Hazlitt's 'depth of taste,' together with 'The Excursion' and Haydon's pictures as 'the three great things to rejoice at in the Age.' He was stimulated and amused by the fiery spirit of the man. 'He is your only good damner and if ever I am damn'd—damn me if I shoul'nt like him to damn me.'

Keats could not accept Hazlitt's estimate of Chatterton, that figure of ill-starred fate so romantic to the early nineteenth century, in whom Hazlitt saw little evidence of anything more than an extraordinary precocity. Probably Keats's disappointment at his treatment of Chatterton was conveyed to Hazlitt, either in person or at second hand, for he prefaced his next lecture by 'I am sorry that what I said . . . should have given dissatisfaction to some persons, with whom I would willingly agree in all such matters.' He then enlarged on his previous statement that the boy Chatterton had shown no definite promise of future greatness but he quoted in full the poem he considered the best, the Minstrel's song in *Ælla*, including Keats's favourite verse beginning: 'Comme, wythe acorne-coppe and thorne.'

It was a sign of his growing reputation that Hazlitt, although he did not really value Keats's poetry till after his death, should pay him the compliment of explaining his attitude in regard to Chatterton. But Keats's fame was growing not only within the Hazlitt-Hunt-Haydon circle but in a wider and more prosperous one. In his own words :

I am in the highway of being introduced to a squad of people, Peter Pindar, Mrs. Opie . . . Mr. Robinson, a great friend of Coleridge's, called on me—Richards tells me my Poems are known in the West Country, and that he saw a very clever copy of verses, headed with a Motto from my Sonnet to George—Honors rush so thickly upon me that I shall not be able to bear up against them.

'Peter Pindar' was Dr. Wolcot, the political satirist, Mrs. Opie a fashionable novelist, wife of John Opie the painter and a cousin of Woodhouse's, and Crabb Robinson the diarist and assiduous cultivator of literary men. But the most striking proof of his increased reputation was an invitation to dine with Horace Smith, joint-author with his brother James of the famous *Rejected Addresses* which had made the Town laugh in 1812, and had thrown open to them, although they were City men, all the fashionable drawing-rooms. He told his brothers :

I dined . . . with Horace Smith, and met his two Brothers, with Hill and Kingston, and one Du Bois. They only served to convince me, how superior humour is to wit in respect to enjoyment—These men say things which make one start, without making one feel ;



they are all alike ; their manners are alike ; they all know fashionables ; they have a mannerism in their every eating and drinking, in their mere handling a Decanter—They talked of Keats and his low company—Would I were with that Company instead of yours, said I to myself ! I know such like acquaintance will never do for me.

James and Horace Smith and Edward Dubois, the editor of the *Monthly Mirror*, were all modish wits. They threw with the dexterity of practice a glittering ball of conversation : since wit must have a target the ball might hit someone on a tender spot but this was part of the game. The Smiths, kindly, thoughtful men, might have suited their conversation to the earnest young romantic but Dubois was dull in serious discourse and preferred to shine in a darting virtuosity of malicious wit. These men had before them that evening a perpetual subject of jest, an insensitive butt, Thomas Hill, the 'literary drysalter' who never took offence so long as he might be among these brilliant men of letters. He was a fat, florid excitable little man, like an elderly cupid, who told richly improbable stories, ending a ridiculous hyperbole with 'Sir, I affirm it with all the solemnity of a death-bed utterance. Sir, I happen to *know* it.' He seemed to have no relations and his age was a matter of mirthful speculation. No skill in questioning could draw it from him. 'The fact is, Hill,' said James Smith, 'that the register of your birth was destroyed in the great fire of London, and you take advantage of that to conceal your real age.' Theodore Hook said he might originally have been one of the little Hills recorded as skipping in the Psalms. Perhaps on this occasion he did not skip much, for Keats does not seem to have got any amusement out of him. It seems difficult to include among these men who were 'all alike' 'the thing Kingston' who was almost certainly that Comptroller of Stamps who caused such convulsed mirth on the night of Haydon's 'immortal dinner.' Of the third Smith brother, Leonard, we know nothing except that he was a prosperous business man.

Looking back on the records of these last wits of the eighteenth century one cannot help feeling a certain amount of sympathy with Keats. One gets weary of their good sayings, even on paper ; there were so many of them. One



JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS  
From a painting by Joseph Severn.



wishes they would be humanly dull for a grateful breathing-space. Keats's attitude to them is interesting as indicative of a change in humour in the two generations; a change which was transforming the bitter personal invective of a Gillray through the kindlier ridicule of Cruikshank to the typical English impersonal humour of the *Punch* artists later in the century.

It was perhaps unfortunate for Keats from a worldly point of view that he was not happy in the company of these men who were all successful and influential; perhaps he might have been spared in some measure the attacks on him in the Tory press if he had moved habitually among them. But Keats would not have been John Keats if he had been worldly-minded.

The 'immortal dinner' was given by Haydon to introduce Keats to Wordsworth and took place on December 28th. Of it Keats wrote:

there was Wordsworth, Lamb, Monkhouse, Landseer, Kingston and your humble Sarvant. Lamb got tipsey and blew up Kingston—proceeding so far as to take the Candle across the Room hold it to his face and show us wh-a-at-sort-fello-he-waas I astonished Kingston at supper with a pertinacity in favour of drinking—keeping my two glasses at work in a knowing way—

Hunt was not there for Haydon had now quarrelled openly with him. His antagonism had come to a head over a trivial matter. Mrs. Hunt, a feckless housekeeper, was in the habit of borrowing silver from Haydon. On this occasion Haydon asked for his property back by a certain date: it was not returned so he sent for it. 'Hunt went to expostulate on the indelicacy &c.—they got to words and parted for ever,' wrote Keats. 'All I hope is at some time to bring them all together again.'

Haydon's account of the dinner is, though highly-coloured, very amusing and a little work of art.

On December 28th the immortal dinner came off in my painting-room, with Jerusalem towering up behind us as a background. Wordsworth was in fine cue, and we had a glorious set-to—on Homer, Shakespeare, Milton and Virgil. Lamb got exceedingly merry and exquisitely witty; and his fun in the midst of Wordsworth's solemn intonations of oratory was like the sarcasm and wit

of the fool in the intervals of Lear's passion. He made a speech and voted me absent, and made them drink my health. "Now," said Lamb, "you old lake poet, you rascally poet, why do you call Voltaire dull?" We all defended Wordsworth, and affirmed there was a state of mind when Voltaire would be dull. "Well," said Lamb, "here's Voltaire—the Messiah of the French nation, and a very proper one too."

He then, in a strain of humour beyond description, abused me for putting Newton's head into my picture; "a fellow," said he, "who believed nothing unless it was as clear as the three sides of a triangle." And then he and Keats agreed he had destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to the prismatic colours. It was impossible to resist him, and we all drank "Newton's health, and confusion to mathematics." It was delightful to see the good humour of Wordsworth in giving in to all our frolics without affectation and laughing as heartily as the best of us.

By this time other friends joined, amongst them poor Ritchie who was going to penetrate by Fezzan to Timbuctoo. I introduced him to all as "a gentleman going to Africa." Lamb seemed to take no notice; but all of a sudden he roared out: "Which is the gentleman we are going to lose?" We then drank the victim's health, in which Ritchie joined.

In the morning of this delightful day, a gentleman, a perfect stranger, had called on me. He said he knew my friends, had an enthusiasm for Wordsworth, and begged I would procure him the happiness of an introduction. He told me he was a comptroller of stamps, and often had correspondence with the poet. I thought it a liberty; but still, as he seemed a gentleman, I told him he might come.

When we retired to tea we found the comptroller. In introducing him to Wordsworth I forgot to say who he was. After a little while the comptroller looked down, looked up and said to Wordsworth: "Don't you think, sir, Milton was a great genius?" Keats looked at me, Wordsworth looked at the comptroller. Lamb who was dozing by the fire turned round and said: "Pray, sir, did you say Milton was a great genius?" "No, sir; I asked Mr. Wordsworth if he were not." "Oh," said Lamb, "then you are a silly fellow." "Charles! my dear Charles!" said Wordsworth; but Lamb, perfectly innocent of the confusion he had created, was off again by the fire.

After an awful pause the comptroller said: "Don't you think Newton a great genius?" I could not stand it any longer. Keats put his head into my books. Ritchie squeezed in a laugh. Wordsworth seemed asking himself: "Who is this?" Lamb got up, and taking a candle, said: "Sir, will you allow me to look

at your phrenological development?" He then turned his back on the poor man, and at every question of the comptroller he chaunted :

"Diddle diddle dumpling, my son John  
Went to bed with his breeches on."

The man in office, finding Wordsworth did not know who he was, said in a spasmodic and half-chuckling anticipation of assured victory : "I have had the honour of some correspondence with you, Mr. Wordsworth." "With me, sir?" said Wordsworth, "not that I remember." "Don't you, sir? I am a comptroller of stamps." There was a dead silence, the comptroller evidently thinking that was enough. While we were waiting for Wordsworth's reply, Lamb sung out :

"Hey diddle diddle,  
The cat and the fiddle."

"My dear Charles!" said Wordsworth.

"Diddle diddle dumpling, my son John,"

chaunted Lamb, and then rising, exclaimed : "Do let me have another look at that gentleman's organs." Keats and I hurried Lamb into the painting-room, shut the door and gave way to inextinguishable laughter. Monkhouse followed and tried to get Lamb away. We went back, but the comptroller was irreconcilable. We soothed and smiled and asked him to supper. He stayed though his dignity was sorely affected. However, being a good-natured man, we parted all in good humour, and no ill effects followed.

All the while, until Monkhouse succeeded, we could hear Lamb struggling in the painting-room and calling at intervals : "Who is that fellow? Allow me to see his organs once more."

It was indeed an immortal evening. Wordsworth's fine intonation as he quoted Milton and Virgil, Keats' eager inspired look, Lamb's quaint sparkle of lambent humour, so speeded the stream of conversation, that in my life I never passed a more delightful time. All our fun was within bounds. Not a word passed that an apostle might not have listened to. It was a night worthy of the Elizabethan age, and my solemn Jerusalem flashing up by the flame of the fire, with Christ hanging over us like a vision, all made up a picture which will long glow upon

"that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude."

Keats made Ritchie promise he would carry his *Endymion* to the great desert of Sahara and fling it in the midst.

Poor Ritchie went to Africa, and died, as Lamb foresaw, in 1819. Keats died in 1821, at Rome. C. Lamb is gone, joking to the last. Monkhouse is dead, and Wordsworth and I are the only two now living (1841) of that glorious party.

Monkhouse's solicitude to get Lamb away is probably explained by the fact that he was Wordsworth's kinsman by marriage and would be especially anxious to defend the dignity of the great man. The comptroller of stamps was successfully mollified and we find him later inviting both Wordsworth and Keats to dinner but, said Keats, 'not liking that place I sent my excuse.' He hated to see Wordsworth, once so strong a Liberal, bowing to established authority and going to dine in a stiff collar.

He was naturally flattered, however, when Wordsworth called and invited him to dinner. He met Wordsworth frequently during his stay in Town. He mentions tantalisingly in a letter Wordsworth's 'beautiful wife and enchanting sister.' One would like to have a description by Keats of Dorothy Wordsworth.

On the whole Keats was disappointed in Wordsworth and perhaps to a certain extent this was inevitable. Wordsworth emerged so seldom from his northern 'shell' that he was a half-legendary figure to the young men. Leigh Hunt said of him at this time: 'I never beheld eyes that looked so inspired or supernatural. They were like fires half burning, half smouldering, with a sort of acrid fixtured regard. . . . One might imagine Ezekiel or Isaiah to have had such eyes. . . .' It was impossible that Keats at the outset should not have felt the power of the man. But Hunt added to the above: 'He had a habit of keeping his left hand in the bosom of his waistcoat; and in this attitude, except when he turned round to take one of the subjects of his criticism from the shelves, he was dealing forth his eloquent but hardly catholic judgments.' The sage who had expressed so simply and finely both the new delight in nature and man's joys and sorrows was now, in his forty-eighth year, fast dwindling down into a humourless, didactic egoist who cared for no contemporary poetry but his own.

During one visit to Wordsworth the sage was making

some weighty pronouncements to Keats upon poetry. Keats, in full agreement with what he was saying, was about to make an assenting remark. He had scarcely opened his mouth before Mrs. Wordsworth, that sedulous acolyte, had put her hand upon his arm saying: "Mr. Wordsworth is never interrupted."

Keats wrote in some irritation to Reynolds:

. . . for the sake of a few fine imaginative or domestic passages, are we to be bullied into a certain Philosophy engendered in the whims of an Egoist—Every man has his speculations, but every man does not brood and peacock over them till he makes a false coinage and deceives himself. Many a man can travel to the very bourne of Heaven, and yet want confidence to put down his half-seeing. . . . We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us—and if we do not agree, seems to put its hand into its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself, but with its subject. . . . Modern poets differ from the Elizabethans in this. Each of the moderns like an Elector of Hanover governs his petty state, and knows how many straws are swept daily from the Causeways in all his dominions and has a continual itching that all the Housewives should have their coppers well scoured. . . . I will have no more of Wordsworth or Hunt in particular.

There had been one galling experience. At a further gathering Keats, at Haydon's request, had recited his ode to Pan from *Endymion*, that great passage so directly inspired by Wordsworth. Severn was there, having been brought by Keats to meet Wordsworth. Reynolds and Leigh Hunt were also present: apparently Keats had been successful in patching up the quarrel between Hunt and Haydon. After the reading the five friends and admirers of Keats's work turned their eyes towards Wordsworth in confident anticipation of enthusiastic approval. There was a pause, then the great man remarked coolly: "A very pretty piece of paganism." This cold-blooded comment struck the company dumb and broke up the party. At Wordsworth's death Keats's presentation copy of the 1817 Poems was found on his bookshelf uncut.

The young Wordsworth, that ardent spirit hailing the French Revolution and toiling in poverty at poetry so near to nature and to the heart of man, was fast hardening into



the elderly pontifical and conservative versifier. His best work was behind him. But once he had written :

—Great God ! I'd rather be  
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn ;  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn ;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea ;  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

But in defence of Wordsworth it must be said that, although Severn considered that Keats read his ode well, there were others who thought that, as most poets do, he read his own verse badly. Also it is likely that Haydon had been filling Wordsworth's ear with stories of the young man's unorthodox ideas and deploring the influence of Hunt who was present on this occasion. It may be that the 'pretty piece of paganism' was in part an improving and reproving remark.

Throughout Keats's letters we catch pleasant glimpses of his early friend, Severn, whom he introduced into his literary circle and tried to interest in Haydon. But in regard to Haydon Severn was sharper-eyed than Keats who, though he was revolted by Wordsworth's large claims, accepted on less sure grounds Haydon's bid for greatness. Severn, although interested in Haydon's work, was almost frightened by 'his excessive vanity and presumption.'

Severn enjoyed meeting Keats's friends but he enjoyed still more his solitary company. On Sundays, the only day on which Severn was free from toilsome miniature-painting, more ambitious attempts in oils and art-classes, they would take long walks in the country. Even to the artist trained to use his eyes Keats's power of observation was an abiding marvel. The song of a bird, the rustle of small creatures in the hedges, the changing light and shadow with their shifting colours, the swaying of a leaf, a branch, the shivering of tall grasses, the slow pageant of the clouds ; nothing escaped him. He was aware, too, of the human beings they met ; the creeping animalism of the many tramps in that starving, workless age, a woman's bright hair, the smile of a rosy child. The sea was never far from his mind. When a wind arose and went, as he said, 'billowing through a tree' or he heard it springing up from afar across a dark-hued wood-

land, he would shout 'The tide, the tide!' and leap up on to a stile or a low bough and await its coming, listening with breath held and cheeks a-glow, 'like a young fawn waiting for some cry from the forest-depths.' Then he would watch intent for the wind to sweep in a gusting wave across the corn or the young tender grasses beneath him.

The rustle of this 'inland sea' was the only thing that could rouse him from certain heavy moods in which he was liable to fall. His eyes veiled in a profound shadow he would shrink into himself, only answering his companion coldly and absently. From fields of oats or barley with their white shivering response to every breeze it was difficult to move him. The sea or an image of the sea could always bring him back to happy calm.

To the sea he was very soon to go now, to Teignmouth to take George's place beside his ailing brother Tom, and on March 8th or 9th he set out from the Bull and Mouth in Holborn on his long journey by coach into the west of England.

## CHAPTER XII

### *At Teignmouth (March-May, 1818)*

TEIGNMOUTH IN SOUTH DEVON WOULD SEEM TO-DAY AN odd choice for Tom but a mild climate was held to be essential to the cure of consumption far into the nineteenth century. Tom was certainly rather better in health and fortunately there was a doctor in the town to whom he took a great fancy, a Dr. Turton who had acquired a reputation outside his profession as an authority upon conchology. The cheerful bustle of a busy port too must have been welcome to the sick boy. He might go down to the harbour at the mouth of the Teign, and see the ships being loaded for Liverpool with the pipe and potter's clay from the pits at Kingsteignton or the fishing vessels bound for the Mediterranean markets; or the big seines being dragged out of the water by women. The fishing women were picturesquely dressed '*à la Hollandaise*' and an old guide-book says, in recommending this as a sight of the town, 'the mingled air of satisfaction at the expectation of a large draught of fishes, and the chagrin and disappointment pictured on their sun-burnt countenances, when a few crabs make their appearance, would not be an unfit subject for the pencil of a Rowlandson.' He would have arrived too late in the year to see the Newfoundland fishing fleet sail after the harvest for their long sojourn in the West. If he were well enough for a walk he might take an easy stroll along the Teign to neighbouring villages or saunter in the sheltered lanes where the deep hedgerows never lose their hint of spring. For George there were steep climbs over Haldon and towards Dawlish along fine sloping cliffs with the sea below.

The town was then divided into two by a stream, the Tame, which now runs below Wellington and Bank Streets. The pleasantly irregular streets were well-paved. In the

Public Rooms there were an Assembly, a reading and a billiard room : there was a theatre, Croydon's Library, pleasure boats on the Teign and the sea and bathing machines ' upwards of twelve in number ' which ' may justly boast a superiority over those of any other part of the kingdom.' If you took a machine you were ducked with ceremony by a bathing man or woman and in winter it cost you a shilling ; double what was charged in summer. This was probably a survival of the uncomfortable old notion that bathing was only beneficial in winter when the pores of the skin were not so open and you were less likely to take a cold. Keats apparently bathed but he probably did it in a less gentlemanly and more active style in the early morning from the shore. There were hot baths at two establishments, but as the cheapest you could obtain was half-a-crown (sixpence extra if you had a fire in the room) it is likely that the Keats boys confined their ablutions to the homely hip-bath.

At No. 20, the Strand, there is a granite plate on the face of the old white Georgian house to the effect that John Keats lived here in 1818. This is by no means a certainty as it rests on the memory of one old man in 1901 who said that his father, William Rufus Jordan, a solicitor in the town, had told him that Keats had dined with him one evening and had informed him that he was lodging in either 21 or 22 the Strand. H. Buxton Forman was able to narrow this down to what is now No. 20. We know that there was opposite Keats's lodging a bonnet-shop for he used to talk to the girls employed there, but reference to old directories failed to track down a bonnet-shop in the Strand at that date. There was one, however, in the thirties, at No. 35, at the corner of Queen Street and nearly opposite to No. 20 the Strand, and this may have been in existence in 1818.

If Keats did lodge at No. 20 he had opposite to him a warehouse for the Newfoundland fishery and perhaps, writing in the window, he looked up at the gaunt outlines of the warehouse and was reminded of the misty regions of the west when he wrote to Reynolds on March 14th :

Write to me or by the holy Beaucoeur—which I suppose is the virgin Mary, or the repented Magdalen, (beautiful name, that Magdalen) I'll take to my Wings and fly away to any where but old or Nova Scotia—

The Strand leads to the Den, a ridge of hard sandbank by the sea now levelled and planted with grass and flower-beds. This was the centre of the seaside life and was referred to by Keats in a letter to the Misses Jeffrey written after his departure :

You might praise it (Teignmouth) . . . in the manner of a grammatical exercise—*The trees are full—the den is crowded—the boats are sailing—the musick is playing.*

‘*The musick,*’ a lively orchestra, still plays in summer on the Den.

In March visitors to Teignmouth could not have been numerous enough to crowd the Den : the friends the Keatses made there were residents of the town. They became intimate with a family named Jeffrey, a widow and four daughters, Marian, Sarah, Fanny and a young one with long hair and ‘a hard brown fist.’ Keats’s mention of the hard brown fist suggests that the brothers were on scuffling terms with the younger ones ; with the elder girls their relations were equally lively. There was flirting among the young people but at least one of the daughters, ‘the steady quiet’ Marian, was intelligent beyond the average and a fit companion for Keats. There was a tradition in the town that he was in love with her ; a tradition founded probably on a love-poem in a volume of verse published by Marian as Mrs. I. S. Prowse after her marriage. The verses are in a musical and thoughtful style, with distinct references to the death of Keats and echoes of lines in ‘*Lamia*’ and ‘*Hyperion*.’ While Keats was in Devon he acquired a black-letter Chaucer which he may have enjoyed with Marian for she employed in certain of these poems the Chaucerian stanza so little in use at the time.

When Lord Houghton was collecting material for his life of Keats, Sarah, the second daughter, wrote offering information but received no reply to her letter. From her he might have gathered much that would illuminate Keats’s life at this period. It is possible that she was ‘one of the girls in the bonnet-shop over the way.’ We know that in later life she made bonnets for a Lady Tonkin. If this were so, friendship with the family may have ripened from casual chat between the young lodgers at No. 20 and ‘the laughing, thoughtless Sarah.’

The effect of John upon the Jeffrey girls was eagerly debated by his two admiring brothers. After George had returned to Town and John had taken his place he wrote to the Misses Jeffrey :

How do you like John? Is he not very original? he does not look by any means as handsome as four months ago, but is he not handsome? I am sure you must like him very much, but don't forget *me*. I suppose Tom gets more lively as his health improves. Tell me what you think of John.

George and John were together at Hampstead for a few days. There must have been anxious discussion of ways and means. George had been out of employment for some time. He was now engaged to Miss Wylie and wanted to secure for himself better prospects of future prosperity.

Keats's long journey down to Teignmouth was made the more tiresome by a change of coaches. The coach from London only ran, through Salisbury, Dorchester, Bridport and Honiton, to Exeter. There he could take either the *Royal Express Coach* or the *Diligence* which was slower but cheaper. Even if he took the faster vehicle the last lap of the journey would take him three hours. He would arrive at Teignmouth about seven o'clock in the evening.

His first three days at Teignmouth were a disappointment. The weather was vile. It rained, that heavy, hopeless Devonshire rain which blots out the view except when the wind, tearing aside the thick wet fog of moisture, reveals green and lovely landscape. 'The hills,' Keats wrote, 'are very beautiful, when you get a sight of 'em . . . the Cliffs are of a fine deep Colour, but then the Clouds are continually vieing with them.' In a jaundiced frame of mind due to fatigue, the weather, and enforced inactivity he dubbed, on very short acquaintance indeed, the men of Devon

the poorest creatures in England—because Government never have thought it worth while to send a recruiting party among them. When I think of Wordsworth's Sonnet 'Vanguard of Liberty! ye Men of Kent!' the degenerated race about me are Pulvis Ipecac. Simplex<sup>1</sup>—a strong dose. Were I a Corsair I'd make a descent on the South Coast of Devon, if I did not run the chance of having cowardice imputed to me: as for the Men they'd run away into the methodist meeting houses, and the Women would be glad of it.

<sup>1</sup> An emetic.

Had England been a large devonshire we should not have won the Battle of Waterloo . . . there are vallies of femminine climate but there are no thews and sinews. . . . I fancy the Air of a deteriorating quality—I fancy the flowers, all precocious, have an Acrasian spell about them—I feel able to beat off the devonshire waves like soap froth.

Keats revealed in his reference to the Methodist meeting-houses his lack of knowledge of the place; there were at this time few Methodists in Teignmouth. Perhaps he had heard his brother or his landlady speak of the 'neat Dissenting Chapel' which had just been erected; the first in the town. Also in abusing the men of Devon Keats probably did not know that most of the able-bodied farm-labourers went off with the Newfoundland fleet, after the harvest had been gathered in, to gut and cure the fish. Of the Teignmouth women Keats said: 'The Women are like your London people in a sort of negative way.' Later he said he admired the beauty of the Devonshire women especially 'the middle-sized delicate Devonshire girls of about 15.'

The passage above, quoted from a letter to Bailey on March 13th, is followed by this fervent expression of feeling:

I like I love England. I like its strong Men. Give me a long brown plain for my Morning so I may meet with some of Edmond Ironside's descendants. Give me a barren mould so I may meet with some Shadowing of Alfred in the Shape of a Gipsej, a Huntsman or a Shepherd. Scenery is fine—but human nature is finer.

Here is the change in outlook which had made him turn from Shakespeare's lovely fairy-tale comedies to *King Lear* and the tragedies; a deepening of the human spirit within him. His contempt at the moment for the men of Devon seems almost an obsession: 'I wonder I meet with no born Monsters—O Devonshire, last night I thought the Moon had dwindled in heaven.'

This letter to Bailey began whimsically with an apology for not having written before and a reply to, or an anticipation of, some friendly reproaches:

Why did I not stop at Oxford in my Way?—How can you ask such a Question? Why did I not promise to do so? Did I not in a Letter to you make a promise to do so? Then how can you be so unreasonable as to ask me why I did not? This is the thing—(for

I have been rubbing up my invention ; trying several sleights—I first polish'd a cold, felt it in my fingers tried it on the table, but could not pocket it ; I tried Chilblains, Rheumatism, Gout, tight Boots, nothing of that sort would do, so this is, as I was going to say, the thing.—I had a Letter from Tom saying how much better he had got, and thinking he had better stop—I went down to prevent his coming up. Will not this do ? Turn it which way you like—it is salvaged all round.

There was a tactful and warm-hearted reference to a printed sermon of Bailey's,

I have never had your Sermon from Wordsworth but Mr<sup>s</sup> Dilke lent it to me. You know my ideas about Religion. I do not think myself more in the right than other people, and that nothing in this world is proveable. I wish I could enter into all your feelings on the subject merely for one short 10 Minutes and give you a Page or two to your liking. I am sometimes so very sceptical as to think Poetry itself a mere Jack a lanthen to amuse whoever may chance to be struck with its brilliance. As Tradesmen say every thing is worth what it will fetch, so probably every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer—being in itself a nothing.

Then followed a richly Keatsian passage,

Ethereal things may at least be thus real, divided under three heads—Things real—things semireal—and no things. Things real—such as existences of Sun Moon & Stars and passages of Shakespeare. Things semi-real such as Love, the Clouds &c which require a greeting of the Spirit to make them wholly exist—and Nothings which are made Great and dignified by an ardent pursuit—which by the by stamps the burgundy mark on the bottles of our Minds, insomuch as they are able to "*consecrate whate'er they look upon.*"

This quotation is from Shelley's 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and one of the few references to contemporary poetry, other than Wordsworth's, in Keats's letters. The Hymn had been published in *The Examiner* in the previous January. Keats then wrote out for Bailey a sonnet of his own 'of a somewhat collateral nature,' 'Four seasons fill the measure of the year.' A comparison of the two poems, both for subject-matter and the handling of it, will reveal the essential differences between the two young poets.

He continued his letter in a vein which, although typically romantic, is startlingly modern :



. . . it is an old maxim of mine and of course must be well known that every point of thought is the centre of an intellectual world—the two uppermost thoughts in a Man's mind are the two poles of his World he revolves on them and everything is southward or northward to him through their means. We take but three steps from feathers to iron.

Then, feeling perhaps that this was a little beyond the scope of the young clergyman and might even draw down upon his head a rebuke, he added with bubbling humour :

Now my dear fellow I must once for all tell you I have not one Idea of the truth of any of my speculations—I shall never be a Reasoner because I care not to be in the right, when retired from bickering and in a proper philosophical temper. So you must not stare if in any future letter I endeavour to prove that Apollo as he had cat gut strings to his Lyre used a cats paw as a Pecten—and further from said Pecten's reiterated and continual teasing came the term Hen peck'd.

At the end he gave bad news. Tom had just had a spitting of blood.

Apart from his love for Tom, Keats was physically affected by illness : perhaps it was this sympathy, so strong that it might be called empathy, which made him take up medicine and surely would have made him, if he had not felt the stronger call of poetry, a great healer. Now, when he was not putting his mind and full strength into the battle with disease ; working positively to combat it, this intense sympathy was a burden, a pain, especially with those he loved. To Reynolds, at home and seriously ill with a rheumatic fever, he wrote :

. . . I hope by this you stand on your right foot—If you are not—that's all,—I intend to cut all sick people if they do not make up their minds to cut sickness—a fellow to whom I have a complete aversion, and who strange to say is harboured and countenanced in several houses where I visit—he is sitting now quite impudent between me and Tom—He insults me at poor Jem Rice's—and you have seated him before now between us at the Theatre—when I thought he looked with a longing eye at poor Kean. I shall say, once for all, to my friends generally, and severally, cut that fellow, or I cut you.

There was so close a link between them that Keats could be sure that Reynolds would read this seemingly callous outburst in the right spirit.

It is symptomatic of his mood of depression, shadowed over as he was by Tom's illness and by the dark, wet weather, that he did not speak of poetry to Reynolds and could not even think of 'a little innocent bit of metaphysic,' for

a favourite tune is hardest to be remembered when one wants it most and you, I know have long ere this taken it for granted that I never have any speculations without associating you in them, where they are of a pleasant nature, and you know enough of me to tell the places where I haunt most, so that if you think for five minutes after having read this you will find it a long letter, and see written in the Air above you,

Your most affectionate friend,

John Keats.

Although the weather continued uncertain there were some fine periods in which he explored vigorously the country round. On the 23rd he sent to Haydon those delightful impromptu lines beginning :

For there's Bishop's teign  
And King's teign  
And Coomb at the clear teign head,  
Where close by the Stream  
You may have your cream  
All spread upon barley bread.

with its rejoicing over the rich spring blossoming of the West :

And O, and O  
The Daisies blow  
And the Primroses are waken'd  
And the violet white  
Sits in silver plight  
And the green bud's as long as the spike end.

and ending :

Then who would go  
Into dark Soho  
And chatter with dack'd hair'd critics  
When he can stay  
For the new mown hay  
And startle the dappled Prickets.

White violets, though not very common about Teignmouth, are abundant at Bishop's Teignton. 'Close by the stream' are the Coombe Cellars, still a refreshment house, where

cockles are fished up from the mud below and served with cream. Keats could not now get his barley bread though he still could see on the cliffland rustling fields of barley to delight him.

His rising spirits not only overflowed into this 'doggrel' but in a 'B——hrell' as he called it, 'Where be ye going you Devon Maid' with its second verse,

I love your Meads and I love your flowers  
And I love your junkets mainly  
But 'hind the door, I love kissing more  
O look not so disdainly !

This may have been a dig at Haydon who was fond of a little flirtation with a pretty girl. Once, when he was in Paris he found a pretty chamber-maid, went out on the stairs to flirt a little but found, to his mortification that a hussar officer 'all in a rattle of chains and spurs' had got there before him.

The verses end in a lovely movement :

I'll put your Basket all safe in a nook  
And your shawl I hang up on this willow  
And we will sigh in the daisy's eye  
And Kiss on a grass green pillow.

Keats had in his letter attacked the weather once more and Haydon, good Devonian, asserted in his reply that he did not think Devonshire more rainy than any other county and that anyhow it had rained almost incessantly in town ever since Keats's departure. If there were rain in Devonshire he must have taken it with him.

On March 24th Keats wrote a light-hearted letter to Rice in the old spirit of hyperbole, saying :

I have seen every thing but the wind—and that they say becomes visible by taking a dose of Acorns or sleeping one night in a hog trough with your tail to the Sow Sow West. . . . I went yesterday to dawlish fair—

Over the hill and over the dale,  
And over the bourn to Dawlish—  
Where Gingerbread Wives have a scanty sale  
And gingerbred nuts are smallish.

There followed in the next four verses 'B——hrell' rather more frank than that sent to Haydon.

A letter written to Reynolds the next day is not only of vital interest in the poetic life of Keats but, following as it does the amusing letter to Rice, shows how swiftly his protean spirit changed in mood and how with an exquisite tact he was able to adapt himself to his highly individual friends. Here is no 'B——hrell' suited to the lively Rice, but a rimed epistle illuminated with thought and beauty. The verse itself is direct and easy : it is interesting to compare it both for subject-matter and technical advance with the epistle to George written less than two years before. The luxuriant quality has gone ; the pictures conveyed are simple in outline and touched in with a surer hand. In the early epistle the rimes of the couplets hit you, but in this letter, as in the major part of *Endymion*, they are unobtrusive and imbedded in the fabric of the poem. It begins :

Dear Reynolds, as last night I lay in bed,  
There came before my eyes that wonted thread  
Of Shapes, and Shadows and Remembrances,  
That every other minute vex and please :  
Things all disjointed come from North and south. . . .

There follows a fantastic group of disconnected images, and then :

Few are there who escape these visitings—  
P'rhaps one or two, whose lives have patent wings ;  
And through whose curtains peeps no hellish nose,  
No wild boar tushes, and no Mermaid's toes :  
But flowers bursting out with lusty pride ;  
And young Æolian harps personified,  
Some, Titian colours touch'd into real life.—  
The sacrifice goes on ; the pontif knife  
Gleams in the sun, the milk-white heifer lows,  
The pipes go shrilly, the libation flows :  
A white sail shews above the green-head cliff  
Moves round the point, and throws her anchor stiff.  
The Mariners join hymn with those on land.—

Without wishing to detract from the quality of the last six lines I would call it near-poetry. In the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' written with conscious artistry and at a period when his aim was to 'load every rift with ore,' the picture is simplified, made more pregnant as,

Who are these coming to the sacrifice ?  
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,  
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,

And all her silken flanks with garlands drest ?  
 What little town by river or sea shore,  
 Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,  
 Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn ?

The picture of which he gave a memory in the epistle was not a Titian but a Claude, 'Sacrifice to Apollo.' The confusion of names was natural enough ; he had seen the the picture hung beside a Titian at the British Institution in 1816. Probably a subconscious doubt about the painter's name led him on to a memory of another picture by Claude, the 'Enchanted Castle.' Of this he had probably only seen an engraving, though the original was within twenty-five miles of London in the collection of William Wells of Redleaf, near Sevenoaks :

You know the Enchanted Castle it doth stand  
 Upon a Rock on the Border of a Lake  
 Nested in Trees, which all do seem to shake  
 From some old Magic like Urganda's sword.  
 O Phœbus that I had thy sacred word  
 To shew this Castle in fair dreaming wise  
 Unto my friend, while sick and ill he lies.

You know it well enough, where it doth seem  
 A mossy place, a Merlin's Hall, a dream.  
 You know the clear Lake, and the little Isles,  
 The Mountains blue, and cold near neighbour rills—  
 All which elsewhere are but half animate  
 Here do they look alive to love and hate ;  
 To smiles and frowns ; they seem a lifted mound  
 Above some giant, pulsing underground. . . .

. . . The doors all look as if they oped themselves,  
 The windows as if latch'd by fays & elves—  
 And from them comes a silver flash of light  
 As from the Westward of a Summer's night ;  
 Or like a beauteous woman's large blue eyes  
 Gone mad through olden songs and Poesies—

See what is coming from the distance dim !  
 A golden galley all in silken trim !  
 Three rows of oars are lightening moment-whiles  
 Into the verdurous bosoms of those Isles.  
 Towards the Shade under the Castle Wall  
 It comes in silence—now 'tis hidden all.  
 The clarion sounds ; and from a postern gate  
 An echo of sweet music doth create  
 A fear in the poor herdsman who doth bring  
 His beasts to trouble the enchanted spring :

In these extracts from the epistle, the stuff of poetry rather than poetry itself, there is more of Keats the individual than in his finished work: the completeness of the poetic conception is manifest, but the detachment of pure creation is not yet attained.

In the 'Nightingale' ode the above picture is transmuted into three lines:

The same that oft-times hath  
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

But Keats was no longer a boy who could find a refuge in dreams of natural and pictured beauty. On this mortal earth we

. . . shadow our own Soul's daytime  
In the dark void of night. For in the world  
We jostle.

His flag is not yet 'unfurl'd on the Admiral staff' so that he dare not yet philosophize:

Things cannot to the will  
Be settled, but they tease us out of thought.  
Or is it that imagination brought  
Beyond its proper bound, yet still confined,—  
Lost in a sort of Purgatory blind,  
Cannot refer to any standard law  
Of either earth or heaven?—It is a flaw  
In happiness to see beyond our bourn—  
It forces us in Summer skies to mourn:  
It spoils the singing of the Nightingale.

He is now at that stage of development when the cruelty and the miseries of the world sit heavy and enigmatic on the shoulders of the young. On 'a Lampit rock of green sea weed' lapped by the waves he sat one evening:

The rocks were silent—the wide sea did weave  
An untumultuous fringe of silver foam  
Along the flat brown sand. I was at home,  
And should have been most happy—but I saw  
Too far into the sea; where every maw  
The greater on the less feeds evermore:—  
But I saw too distinct into the core  
Of an eternal fierce destruction,  
And so from Happiness I far was gone. . . .

The Shark at savage prey—the hawk at pounce,  
The gentle Robin, like a pard or ounce,  
Ravening a worm—

But this is no food for a sick man, so

Away ye horrid moods,  
Moods of one's mind! You know I hate them well,  
You know I'd sooner be a clapping bell  
To some Kamschatkan missionary church,  
Than with these horrid moods be left in lurch—  
Do you get health—and Tom the same—I'll dance,  
And from detested moods in new Romance  
Take refuge—

The new romance was 'Isabella, or the Pot of Basil.' Very soon we find him writing to George for his folio Shakespeare in which he had placed the first few stanzas.

In a letter to Haydon of April 8th Keats gives us a further revelation of the workings of the poetic mind in speaking of, The innumerable compositions and decompositions which take place between the intellect and its thousand materials before it arrives at that trembling delicate and snail-horn perception of Beauty.

The delight of spring is coming upon the countryside, the primroses are out and

The Hedges by this time are beginning to leaf—Cats are becoming more vociferous—young Ladies that wear Watches are always looking at them—Women about forty five think the season very backward—Ladie's Mares have but half an allowance of food.

but it is still rainy. Both brothers were feeling the effects of the dull, wet weather. 'Tom is quite low-spirited—It is impossible to live in a country which is continually under hatches.' In three weeks they had only six fine days. The wet weather gave Keats plenty of time within doors to finish his revision of *Endymion* and to work upon 'Isabella.' He sent his preface to *Endymion* to Reynolds for criticism. It had a strong personal note and to those who did not know him it might have appeared inconsistent. 'I have written to please myself, and in hopes to please others, and for a love of fame' might not come well from a man who spoke of his 'modesty and non-opinion of himself.' Reynolds condemned it, thinking it, from the point of view of the public, affected and 'Huntian.' Keats bowed to Reynolds's superior knowledge of the book-world. He was also not too proud to accept certain emendations made by Taylor to his poem.

He rewrote the preface defending, however, the seeming arrogance which arose from a knowledge of his high calling. 'I would fain escape the bickerings that all Works not exactly in chime bring upon their begetters—but this is not fair to expect,—there must be conversation of some sort and to object shows a man's consequence.' 'I have not,' he wrote,

the slightest feeling of humility towards the Public—or to anything in existence,—but the eternal Being, the Principle of Beauty, and the Memory of great Men—When I am writing for myself for the mere sake of the Moment's enjoyment, perhaps nature has its course with me—but a Preface is written to the Public; a thing I cannot help looking upon as an Enemy, and which I cannot address without feelings of Hostility—If I write a Preface in a supple or subdued style, it will not be in character with me as a public speaker. . . .

I never wrote one single Line of Poetry with the least Shadow of public thought.

. . . I could not live without the love of my friends—I would jump down Ætna for any great Public Good—but I hate a Mawkish Popularity—I cannot be subdued before them—My glory would be to daunt and dazzle the thousand jabberers about Pictures and Books—I see swarms of Porcupines with their Quills erect "like lime-twigs set to catch my Winged Book" and I would fright 'em away with a torch.

Not that, he said, his preface was much of a torch, but he could not keep out of it 'an undersong of disrespect to the Public.' He must write another 'without a thought of these people.'

He was now looking forward to the walking-tour he had planned to take with Charles Brown during the summer, a preliminary to more extended travel. 'If my Books will help me to it—thus I will take all Europe in turn, and see the Kingdoms of the Earth and the glory of them.' To us it is odd to think of a poet anticipating any considerable gain from poetry. But this was a verse-reading age: of two popular poets Byron had been given £1000 for a single canto of *Don Juan* and Tom Moore £3000 for *Lalla Rookh*. It would seem however that Keats, rather than under-estimating the intelligence of the public, was over-estimating it if he thought that such rare and original work as his would



bring in sums large enough to allow of much travel, even in a modest way.

*Endymion* was published towards the end of April. On the 27th Keats sent a list of errata to Taylor and apologised for having left to him 'all the trouble of *Endymion*.' Although Cowden Clarke had some hand in the correcting of the proofs, Taylor appears to have done the main part of it. Keats philosophized sadly to him,

young Men for some time have an idea that such a thing as happiness is to be had and therefore are extremely impatient under any unpleasant restraining—in time however, of such stuff is the world about them, they know better and instead of striving from Uneasiness greet it as an habitual sensation, a pannier which is to weigh upon them through life.

On the first reading in the House of a bill for the prevention of cruelty to animals it was suggested that asses should be included. The Members rocked with laughter at the idea of the familiar beast of burden being protected. With this in mind Keats's metaphor of the pannier, too often loaded beyond the pitiful little creature's strength, gains in effect.

He was getting his impatient, ebullient nature under control. While he was at Teignmouth he was insulted at the theatre, probably by one of those troublesome fellows among whom it was the fashion to come in at half price and interrupt the performance with drunken outcries. Keats did not fight him. A few years nearer boyhood this would have been an irresistible provocation. Even now he was a little ashamed of the admission of pacifism. We hear only of one fight in adult years: he thrashed a lout in Hampstead whom he found tormenting a kitten.

There may have been money-worries to add their weight to 'the burden of the mystery' at this time. We know that once Keats had to borrow from his landlady. That, however, might happen to the improvident as well as the needy: Keats was never careful with money.

On April 27th it was still raining. 'There is a continual courtesy between the Heavens and the Earth. The heavens rain down their unwelcomeness and the Earth sends it up again to be returned to-morrow.' It is not surprising to hear that Tom was worse.

Keats was determined to enlarge the bounds of his intellect not only in travel but in severe study. He has been 'hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious and a love for Philosophy': he must now take the harder road. He wrote to Reynolds:

I . . . shall learn Greek, and very likely Italian—and in other ways prepare myself to ask Hazlitt in about a year's time the best metaphysical road I can take. For although I take Poetry to be the Chief, there is something else wanting to one who passes his life among Books and thoughts upon Books—I long to feast upon old Homer as we have upon Shakespeare, and as I have lately upon Milton. If you understood Greek, and would read me passages, now and then, explaining their meaning, 'twould be, from its mistiness, perhaps a greater luxury than reading the thing one's self.

In a letter on May 3rd he expressed his attitude more generally in magnificent metaphor:

The difference of high Sensations with and without knowledge appears to me this—in the latter case we are falling continually ten thousand fathoms deep and being blown up again without wings and with all the horror of a bare shoulderd creature—in the former case, our shoulders are fledge, and we go thro' the same air and space without fear.

An extensive knowledge takes away 'the heat and fever'; it helps to 'ease the Burden of the Mystery.'

Were I to study physic or rather Medicine again, I feel it would not make the least difference in my Poetry; when the Mind is in its infancy a Bias is in reality a Bias, but when we have acquired more strength, a Bias becomes no Bias. Every department of Knowledge we see excellent and calculated towards a great whole.

He was glad he had not given his medical books away and would look through them from time to time to keep 'alive the little I know thitherwards.' This does not exactly square with Reynolds's statement that Keats never spoke of his student days except to regret that he had endured 'a one of them.'

There was an occasion when, if the story be true,<sup>1</sup> he was

<sup>1</sup> From a letter to the *Literary World*, April 4th, 1871. The writer describes his informant as 'Mr. Horne, the author of the drama of Joseph and his Brethren.' The author of this drama was Charles Wells.

glad to exercise his late profession. Wells told an old school-fellow that, some time after Keats had abandoned medicine, they were walking together when Keats hurried forward to the help of a poor man who had met with an accident. His leg was broken and Keats immediately set it 'in a masterly manner.' As they walked away Keats remarked that 'there was great pleasure in alleviating suffering; but it was a dreadful profession, on account of having to witness so much.'

But, however much he might respect knowledge, actual experience is of the highest value :

. . . axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses : We read fine things but never feel them to the full until we have gone the same steps as the Author.— . . . now I shall relish Hamlet more than I ever have done. . . . You are sensible no Man can set down Venery as a bestial or joyless thing until he is sick of it. . . . Until we are sick, we understand not ;—in fine, as Byron says, " Knowledge is Sorrow ", and I go on to say that, " Sorrow is Wisdom "—and further for aught we can know for certainty " Wisdom is folly " !

The lighter touch in the last phrase led him on to some gay nonsense and from thence he returned to high seriousness in that wonderful parable, a ' simile of human life ' :

I compare human life to a large Mansion of Many Apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me. The first we step into we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think—We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it ; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of this thinking principle within us—we no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight : However among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man—of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression—whereby this Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken'd and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open—but all dark—all leading to dark passages—We see not the ballance of good and evil. We are

in a Mist. We are now in that state—We feel the “burden of the Mystery.” . . .

. . . Now if we live, and go on thinking, we . . . shall explore them. . . .

He had been comparing the ethical values of Milton and Wordsworth and had come to the conclusion that Wordsworth had the finer message, more by reason of ‘the general and gregarious march of intellect’ than by any individual greatness of mind. Milton was bound as a man of his time to place too much emphasis on the benefits of Protestantism and to consider it ‘under the immediate eye of heaven.’

Continuing his parable :

Your third Chamber of Life shall be a lucky and a gentle one—stored with the wine of love—and the Bread of Friendship.

This graceful reference to Reynolds’s future marriage may have been written with a purpose. Reynolds was ill and in poor spirits. Anxious, in view of his engagement, to insure a more certain livelihood, he had decided to become a lawyer and was now an articled clerk. He disliked the law and did not do well in it in spite of exceptional opportunities. Rice, who had paid his articles, took him into partnership as soon as he was qualified and later abandoned the practice to him. He continued to write, but under the names of ‘John Hamilton’ and ‘Edward Herbert’: it was considered beneath the dignity of a professional man, or at least unwise, to be known as a writer. It is possible that this divided interest helped seriously to injure his prospects and to prevent him from becoming, either the writer he could have been or a good lawyer. Although John Reynolds had a certain success in his day he would, but for his association with Keats and Tom Hood, be almost forgotten. But this was in the future ; at present he was sitting uncomfortably on an office stool and trying to adapt himself to his chosen profession.

In Keats a native strength of mind was triumphing over dark circumstance ; ‘Tom had spit a leetle blood this afternoon, and that is rather a damper.’ Tom was getting tired of Devonshire and restless to return to Town. The brothers decided to leave Teignmouth before they had planned. Perhaps Keats felt some regret at leaving Devon, now, in spite of the rain, at the height of its beauty. The fields and hedgerows were rich with flowers and the wild

cherry, the golden gorse, the myrtle and hydrangea bloomed to the edge of the sea. 'I shall,' he wrote, 'breathe worsted stockings (on the restless legs of the Bentley boys) sooner than I thought for.' But he was looking forward to walks upon the Heath with Reynolds and rejoicings together over that new acquisition of his, the black-letter Chaucer, printed in 1596. Treasures of this kind were, in an age hardly awake to the glories of the old poetry, within the means of moderate purses.

Very soon he was on his long weariful journey back to London with poor Tom so ill that at Bridport he lost a quantity of blood. They travelled in a chaise at least as far as Honiton, avoiding the longer, hilly journey up to Exeter by taking the coast road through Dawlish to Starcross, then up to Exminster and over the Exe by the Countess Weir Bridge. From Honiton Keats sent back to the kindly Mrs. Jeffrey a note saying that Tom had, so far, stood the journey well, and at one stage Tom wrote to 'the girls' thanking them for a parting present of flowers.

Back in Hampstead they found that George, unsuccessful in obtaining employment, had determined to emigrate to the back settlements of North America and turn farmer, taking with him Georgiana Wylie as wife. The prospect to Keats of the loss of a brother he loved, and on whom he leaned in wordly affairs, brought on the numb feeling again, 'the feel of not to feel it.' He wrote to Bailey :

I am in that temper that if I were under Water I would scarcely kick to come to the top. I know very well 'tis all nonsense . . . I feel no spur at my Brothers going to America, and am almost stony-hearted about his wedding.

But there was a haven, a refuge in the sympathy of his friends, and he expressed it in a lovely simile, 'tis like an Albatross sleeping on its wings.'

Fate had already dealt none too kindly with Keats ; now she was to weave into the web of his life darker and darker strands. But she wove on the bright warp of essential poetry friendship-threads of a lovely hue. In the allegory of his life, of the lives of all poets, it is perhaps easier to grasp the significance of the suffering, but the images of happiness have their primal meaning too. There must be light to darkness and for the shadow, the sun.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *Endymion* (1818)

**K**EATS HIMSELF WROTE WITH REGARD TO 'PARADISE LOST,' 'There is always a great charm in the openings of great poems.' *Endymion* opens with a line that is a household word and continues in the next twenty-three lines in a vein of rich, quiet beauty which sets the tone of the whole poem. In this opening section there is the germ of all the beauty that is *Endymion*; 'sweet dreams,' and 'quiet breathing,' 'the sun, the moon, Trees old and young,' 'daffodils with the green world they live in,' 'clear rills,' 'the mid forest brake,' 'fair musk-rose blooms,' and 'the mighty dead, All lovely tales that we have heard and read.'

The story of *Endymion* has a dew upon it. It has not the actuality of the later work; the beings in it are not strongly-coloured, bold and definite but shadowed forth in 'dim dreams' and only occasionally emerge clear and bright from the shifting many-hued cloud of youthful imaginings. The accomplished passages can be picked out from the body of the work; in 'The Eve of St. Agnes' a stanza can be admired for its own beauty but it is a stanza of the complete poem and must be related to what went before and what follows. And yet, fluid, unequal as *Endymion* is, it is an entity, a whole informed with an individual and rich poetic imagination. It is 'a little Region to wander in,' a world as complete and touched with new life as any Spenser made. Perhaps to realise to the full the enchantment of this dream-world we must read *Endymion* in youth when we can take in our stride the immature and 'mawkish' passages and travel with the shepherd-prince in earth, air and water with that ease of imagination we brought earlier to *The Arabian Nights* or to our own loved fairy-tales. The maturer mind will pick and choose, finding in its wanderings 'food for a Week's

stroll in Summer'; a delight in mirrored nature and in passages of wrought poetry and pregnant thought.

Keats himself intended the poem to be an allegory. Endeavours have been made to work the fable out, but never with complete success. It is generally accepted however that the main thread is the quest of the poet after beauty. To each of us the poem will yield something different and to me it appears that there is in it too the eternal quest for the love of woman. This was a strong element in the romantics and many, like poor Shelley, did not get beyond 'the desire of the moth for the star,' that nympholeptic longing which made them look in every woman for a goddess. 'Some of us,' Shelley wrote sadly, 'have in a prior existence been in love with an Antigone, and that makes us find no full content in any mortal tie.' Keats was set more firmly on the earth; he was the more normal man and as poet could perhaps divine that physical love (the Indian maid) could blend with ideal love or beauty (the Moon goddess) in a perfect union. The psychological value of physical love has been hailed as a modern discovery but it had its roots in the new freedom of emotion and thought at the beginning of the last century. There are indications that the relations between man and woman were talked of in Hunt's circle. Barry Cornwall tells us that Hunt himself 'had a crochet or theory about social intercourse (between the sexes) to which he never made any converts.' This used to irritate Hazlitt who said: 'D—— him, it's always coming out like a rash. Why doesn't he write a book about it, and get rid of it.' Bailey, although he admired *Endymion*, published two letters (signed N. Y.) in praise of it in the *Oxford University and City Herald*, and recommended it to the Oxford booksellers, deplored 'the moral part of it' and thought it 'indelicate.' He criticised to Taylor, 'The approaching inclination it has to that abominable principle of Shelley that sensual Love is the principle of things. Of this I believe him (Keats) to be unconscious and can see how by a process of imagination he might arrive at so false, delusive and dangerous a conclusion.'

On January 30th Keats sent to Taylor the passage in Book I, line 777, beginning 'Wherein lies happiness' with this comment:

such a preface is necessary to the subject. The whole thing must I think have appeared to you, who are a consecutive Man, as a thing almost of mere words—but I assure you that when I wrote it it was a regular stepping of the Imagination towards a Truth. My having written that Argument will perhaps be of the greatest Service to me of anything I ever did. It set before me at once the gradations of Happiness even like a kind of Pleasure Thermometer—and is my first Step towards the chief attempt in the Drama—the playing of different Natures with Joy and Sorrow.

'the playing of different Natures with Joy and Sorrow.' The 'Argument' then is of supreme importance in the poem :

Wherein lies happiness ? In that which beck  
 Our ready minds to fellowship divine,  
 A fellowship with essence ; till we shine,  
 Full alchemiz'd and free of space. Behold  
 The clear religion of heaven ! Fold  
 A rose leaf round thy finger's taperness,  
 And soothe thy lips : hush, when the airy stress  
 Of music's kiss impregnates the free winds,  
 And with a sympathetic touch unbinds  
 Æolian magic from their lucid wombs :  
 Then old songs waken from enclouded tombs  
 Old ditties sigh above their father's grave ;  
 Ghosts of melodious prophecyings rave  
 Round every spot where trod Apollo's foot ;  
 Bronze clarions awake, and faintly bruit,  
 Where long ago a giant battle was ;  
 And, from the turf, a lullaby doth pass  
 In every place where infant Orpheus slept.  
 Feel we these things ?—that moment we have stept  
 Into a sort of oneness, and our state  
 Is like a floating spirit's. But there are  
 Richer entanglements, enthrallments far  
 More self-destroying, leading, by degrees,  
 To the chief intensity : the crown of these  
 Is made of love and friendship, and sits high  
 Upon the forehead of humanity.  
 All its more ponderous and bulky worth  
 Is friendship, whence there ever issues forth  
 A steady splendour ; but at the tip-top,  
 There hangs by unseen film, an orb'd drop  
 Of light, and that is love : its influence,  
 Thrown in our eyes, genders a novel sense,  
 At which we start and fret ; till in the end,  
 Melting into its radiance, we blend,



Mingle, and so become a part of it,—  
 Nor with aught else can our souls interknit  
 So wingedly : when we combine therewith,  
 Life's self is nourish'd by its proper pith,  
 And we are nurtured like a pelican brood.  
 Aye, so delicious is the unsating food,  
 That men, who might have tower'd in the van  
 Of all the congregated world, to fan  
 And winnow from the coming step of time  
 All chaff of custom, wipe away all slime  
 Left by men-slugs and human serpentry,  
 Have been content to let occasion die,  
 Whilst they did sleep in love's elysium.  
 And truly I would ever be struck dumb,  
 Than speak against this ardent listlessness :  
 For I have ever thought that it might bless  
 The world with benefits unknowingly ;  
 As does the nightingale, upperched high,  
 And cloister'd among cool and bunched leaves—  
 She sings but to her love, nor e'er conceives  
 How tiptoe Night holds back her dark-grey hood,  
 Just so may love, although 'tis understood  
 The mere commingling of passionate breath,  
 Produce more than our searching witnesseth :  
 What I know not : but who, of men, can tell  
 That flowers should bloom, or that green fruit would swell  
 To melting pulp, that fish would have bright mail,  
 The earth its dower of river, wood, and vale,  
 The meadows runnels, runnels pebble-stones,  
 The seed its harvest, or the lute its tones,  
 Tones ravishment, or ravishment its sweet  
 If human souls did never kiss and greet ?

Endymion, his quest not yet begun, speaks of human love,  
 or desire. His thoughts turning to his immortal love, he says :

Now, if this earthly love has power to make  
 Men's being mortal, immortal ; to shake  
 Ambition from their memories, and brim  
 Their measure of content : what merest whim,  
 Seems all this poor endeavour after fame,  
 To one, who keeps within his stedfast aim  
 A love immortal, an immortal too . . .

. . . No, no, I'm sure,

My restless spirit never could endure  
 To brood so long upon one luxury,  
 Unless it did, though fearfully, espy  
 A hope beyond the shadow of a dream.

In the fourth book there is an important passage when Endymion, having caught a lovely glimpse of the moon in heaven, turns to the Indian maid and finds her vanishing. Still reclining on his winged steed his spirit goes into the 'native hell' where the ghosts of 'buried griefs' arise only to 'linger weeping' for a brief space,

. . . for the pierce  
Of new-born woe it feels more inly smart :

This is despair, a state of mind common to us all. But here there follows a difficult passage :

. . . the man is yet to come  
Who hath not journeyed in this native hell.  
But few have ever felt how calm and well  
Sleep may be had in that deep den of all.  
There anguish does not sting; nor pleasure pall :  
Woe-hurricanes beat ever at the gate,  
Yet all is still within and desolate.  
Beset with painful gusts, within ye hear  
No sound so loud as when on curtain'd bier  
The death-watch tick is stifled. Enter none  
Who strive therefore : on the sudden it is won.

. . . Happy gloom !  
Dark Paradise ! where pale becomes the bloom  
Of health by due ; where silence dreariest  
Is most articulate ; where hopes infest ;  
Where those eyes are the brightest far that keep  
Their lids shut longest in a dreamless sleep.  
O happy spirit-home ! O wondrous soul !  
Pregnant with such a den to save the whole  
In thine own depth. Hail, gentle Carian !  
For never since thy griefs and woes began,  
Hast thou felt so content : a grievous feud  
Hath led thee to this Cave of Quietude.

The retreat into the 'Cave of Quietude' Mr. Middleton Murry (*Studies in Keats*) claims as a mystic experience but few of us have the gift or power of mysticism to follow him into those hidden regions of the spirit. My own interpretation is that Endymion, alone and forlorn, had to gather together the shattered pieces of his life and in pain of spirit withdraw into himself and there find himself. His young dreaming spirit had gone forth questing for the Moon-goddess and in that search he had been subject to the natural influences of earth, air and water with only the outward ethereal influence

of the moon to sustain and guide him. This influence had not been strong enough to protect him from the physical beauty of the Indian maid and the transient human sympathy aroused by her weeping. He had lost himself and now he must withdraw into the fastnesses of his own being to find himself, to gain that inner control which alone enables a human being to give himself wholly and completely in love; the love that is stronger than death.

Returning to earth and finding the Indian maid once more beside him he decides upon a comfortable second-best, the love of the Indian maid and an abiding joy in nature. He is determined to put aside his love for Cynthia until the hour shall come

When we shall meet in pure elysium.

But to a man loved by an immortal, to Keats touched with the divine fire and intuitively wise, the second-best is not possible and he is denied his earthly comfort. The Indian maid herself forbids it. She cries :

“I may not be thy love : I am forbidden— . . .

. . . We might commit

Ourselves at once to vengeance ; we might die ;

We might embrace and die : voluptuous thought ! ”

To the human being voluptuous thought, voluptuous love alone is not food for the spirit but death. Endymion makes his renunciation :

“ ’Mong men, are pleasures real as real may be :

But there are higher ones I may not see,

If impiously an earthly realm I take.”

In this asceticism of spirit both he and the Indian maid prepare to retire from the world but the miracle happens, as it happens in rare cases to men and women who achieve a perfect love. The Indian maid is transformed into the Moon goddess : physical love between two controlled beings, masters of themselves, is fused with the spiritual love which is Beauty and a part of that love which passeth all understanding.

Love, Beauty, Truth, all these things were to merge in Keats's mind, a spiritual entity : in *Endymion* he is groping through the mists of unformed thought and imperfect poetic imagination towards all three.

In that candid preface which delivered him whole into the hands of the reviewer-slaughterers he said 'the reader . . . must soon perceive a great inexperience, immaturity and every error denoting a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished . . . there is not a fiercer hell than the failure in a great object,' and in the unpublished preface, 'Before I began I had no inward feel of being able to finish; and as I proceeded my steps were all uncertain.' *Endymion* is a growth, a progression; he was in the 'go-cart,' learning to walk as he learnt in his eighteenth-century childhood to exercise his young limbs. The Keats who wrote the last word of *Endymion* at Burford Bridge in November had in a few months emerged, growing in strength, beauty and colour, from his chrysalis. Of the earlier *Endymion* period when he was struggling to free himself he wrote:

The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted: thence proceeds mawkishness, and all the thousand bitters which those men I speak of must necessarily taste in going over the following pages.

'Those men I speak of' are those 'who are competent to look, and who do look with a jealous eye, to the honor of English literature.'

The preface ends in these lovely, balanced lines:

I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece, and dulled its brightness: for I wish to try once more, before I bid it farewell.

Apart from the great passages, there are in *Endymion* scattered phrases which start out of the page, so pregnant, so vivid are they and so classic in their simplicity:

. . . the Argonauts, in bright amaze

. . . old Deucalion mountain'd o'er the flood,  
Or blind Orion hungry for the morn.

of the god of love,

. . . awfully he stands,  
A sovereign quell is in his waving hands;  
No sight can bear the lightning of his bow;

the Dramatic ending to Book II:

The visions of the earth were gone and fled—  
He saw the giant sea above his head.

To the moon:

O Moon! far-spooming Ocean bows to thee,  
of Glaucus' bewitched love:

. . . Cold, O cold indeed  
Were her fair limbs, and like a common weed  
The sea-swell took her hair.

Many of the literary influences at work in *Endymion* have been traced by scholars, but I have wondered if the mine of contemporary literature has not been too much neglected. As an instance, the journeying of Endymion through earth, water and air has rightly been attributed to Ovid's

FIRE, AIRE, EARTH, WATER, all the Opposites  
That strove in *Chaos*, powrefull Love unites;

but may not the travels through earth, water and air in Southey's *The Curse of Kehama* have to some extent kindled Keats's imagination? He could hardly have avoided reading this strongly coloured and dramatic poem which had run into four editions by 1818. It might too have suggested to him the Indian maid.

Dr. Spurgeon has in her 'descriptive study' *Keats's Shakespeare* pointed out the close analogy between Shakespearean passages and passages in *Endymion*. I give a few striking examples from *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments  
Will hum about mine ears;

. . . the swift treble pipe, and humming string.

And pluck the wings from painted butterflies,  
To fan the moon-beams from his sleeping eyes

. . . yet, his eyelids,  
Widened a little, as when Zephyr bids  
A little breeze to creep between the fans  
Of careless butterflies:

And for night-tapers, crop their waxen thighs,  
And light them at the fiery glow-worm's eyes,

And, while beneath the evening's sleepy frown  
Glow-worms began to trim their starry lamps,

The Shakespearean passages above are all doubly marked, both underscored and lined at the side, in Keats's seven-volume edition. Although clearly derivative Keats's corresponding lines are not imitative. He has wrought his memories into new and individual conceptions.

Of those many adjectives not always happily used ending in -y, of which 'pipy,' 'sluicy,' 'surgy' and 'towery' appear to be his own coinage, Dr. de Sélincourt points out that they may have been employed in the cause of melody to lighten the metre. The disappearance of the lightly stressed terminal vowel syllables in English has led to a definite loss of grace and lightness in rimed couplets. Dr. Bridges pointed out that Chaucer's

As thick as motēs in the sonnē beams

becomes in Milton

As the gay motes that people the sunbeams.

He commented on the successful use of the lightly accented -y in

In desolate places, where dank moisture breeds  
The pipy hemlock to strange undergrowth ;

The archaic unelided -ed so much used by Keats in his early poems may have had something of the same purpose. This weakness he converted to a strength in his later work in such perfect usage as in,

. . . her vespers done,  
 Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees ;  
 Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one ;  
 Loosens her fragrant boddice ;

and

As when, upon a tranced summer-night,  
Those green-rob'd senators of mighty woods,  
Tall oaks, branch-charm'd by the earnest stars,

*Endymion*, in spite of Keats's growing reputation in the literary world, sold little better than the 1817 volume. Taylor himself was disappointed in the poem and probably did not

anticipate a large sale. He had enjoyed the first book and after reading it had suggested publication in quarto provided Haydon would, as promised, provide a frontispiece for it. Haydon, however, who made a song to Keats about doing it as a favour he had not accorded to any other man, said he would do a head of Keats in chalk but apparently it never went beyond the suggestion. The poem was denied the dignity of quarto. Probably this was a practical advantage; it was by 1818 rather old-fashioned to publish in quarto and, as Byron once pointed out to Hunt, it was 'the worst possible size for circulation.'

Possible reasons for the unpopularity of *Endymion* are many; the first and strongest being, of course, the difficulty every original genius has in making his voice heard in his own generation. Then there was his avowed connection with Hunt, the new-fangled poet of the Cockney School and libeller of princes. Keats himself reminded the public of this by an attack upon the ruling powers at the beginning of Book III:

There are who lord it o'er their fellow-men  
With most prevailing tinsel: who unpen  
Their baaing vanities, to browse away  
The comfortable green and juicy hay  
From human pastures;

By the blea-eyed nations in empurpled vests,  
And crowns, and turbans.

This was talk as dangerous and as unpalatable to the rich and fashionable buyers of books as Communism is to-day. Of this passage Keats himself said 'with much simplicity, "It will easily be seen what I think of the present ministers."'

The sub-title of the book was misleading to a public who thought of a romance as a love-story in a wild and Radcliffian setting. The astute Taylor had early realised this and advised the omission of 'A Poetic Romance' but Keats had insisted, saying that a romance 'is a fine thing notwithstanding the circulating Libraries.' Another weakness from the selling point of view was pointed out by a reviewer who said that 'nobody cares for mythological subjects nowadays.' The public in that post-war travelling age, in an age when

reading was becoming rapidly more general and books more accessible, wanted something new. They liked highly coloured stories in novel settings. The East was fashionable. Not only did Southey's *The Curse of Kehama* go through four editions in eight years but his *Thalaba the Destroyer* was published in three editions between 1801 and 1814. Byron and Moore were paid huge sums for their poems in exotic settings and Campbell's *Gertrude of Wyoming*, a sensational story of the virgin lands of romance in North America, was immensely popular. Lustrous dark-eyed maidens, Eastern gods, peris, shadowy and sinister demons, the burning Ghat, Red Indians, djinns and afriids were the strong fare palatable to a wide public that nowadays would only tolerate its works of fiction in prose form. Scotland too was almost as novel to the readers of this age as the more distant lands of romance. Chiefs and pibrochs, castles and forays and above all the now fashionable mountain scenery helped to create the vogue for the Wizard of the North. Among the older generation didactic poems with such titles as 'The Pleasures of Hope,' 'The Pleasures of Memory' were still enjoyed.

Then, apart from the thinness of the 'story' of the poem, there was what Bailey called its 'moral.' *Endymion* to people incapable of grasping its imaginative content contained a very doubtful moral or no moral at all. Reading aloud was general and family reading an institution. A generation that finds the 'kisses' and 'slippery blisses' of the poem either tiring, immature or amusing can scarcely realise the horror of the father of a family reading to a bevy of sewing daughters if he came across a passage like this :

. . . . . he found  
The soothest mossy bed and deepest, where  
He threw himself, and just into the air  
Stretching his indolent arms, he took, O bliss !  
A naked waist :

or

Enchantress ! tell me by this soft embrace,  
By the most soft completion of thy face,  
Those lips, O slippery blisses, twinkling eyes,  
And by these tenderest, milky sovereignties—

And, most damning of all to the reading public, there were the adverse reviews in the great Tory organs, the *Quarterly*



and *Blackwood's*. It is difficult now to realise the deadly power of these journals. When Hazlitt's *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* came out nearly two editions were sold in about three months. Then the *Quarterly* published a review in which they made the astounding statement that Hazlitt knew nothing whatsoever about Shakespeare and there were no more copies sold.

Then there was the dread epithet of 'Cockneyism.' The pundits of the north, ever jealous of the reputation of their 'Athens,' were only too ready to bring this charge; a charge the full force of which cannot be realised nowadays. The old antagonism between Court and City had in some measure survived right into the nineteenth century and now the Arts were under the patronage of a ruler who prided himself on being a connoisseur. The aristocracy was still inclined to despise and suspect the rising middle-classes and powerful enough to make their influence felt. Francis Place, the social and political reformer, was also a West End tailor of fashion. He had a large library of books above his shop which he kept sedulously concealed from his patrons. One day a clumsy assistant let an influential lord see into the library and Place's profits dropped by more than a thousand a year. The noble lord resented his tailor reading and said that the fellow couldn't cut his breeches properly if his head were full of such things. A tradesman was expected to be ignorant. In *Blackwood's* review of *Endymion* Keats was dubbed apothecary's apprentice and an apothecary was nothing more than a genteelish tradesman. The claims of 'ploughboy poets,' Clare or Bloomfield, might with safety be condescendingly recognised and there was the precedent of the now established Burns; but not those of a Cockney fellow.

Keats, whether from pride or distaste, had never talked of his origins. It must have been a bombshell to him to read:

Of all the manias of this mad age, the most incurable, as well as the most common, seems to be no other than the *Metromanie*. The just celebrity of Robert Burns and Miss Baillie has had the melancholy effect of turning the heads of we know not how many farm-servants and unmarried ladies; our very footmen compose tragedies, and there is scarcely a superannuated governess in the island that does not leave a roll of lyrics behind her in her band-

box. To witness the disease of any human understanding, however feeble, is distressing; but the spectacle of an able mind reduced to a state of insanity is of course ten times more afflicting. It is with such sorrow as this that we have contemplated the case of Mr. John Keats. This young man appeared to have received from nature talents of an excellent, perhaps even of a superior order—talents which, devoted to the purpose of any useful profession, must have rendered him a respectable, if not an eminent citizen. His friends, we understand, destined him to the career of medicine, and he was bound apprentice some years ago to a worthy apothecary in town. But all has been undone by a sudden attack of the malady to which we have alluded. Whether Mr. John has been sent home with a diuretic or composing draught to some patient far gone in the poetical mania, we have not heard. This much is certain, that he has caught the infection, and that thoroughly.

It would have been all the more bitter to Keats if he had known that it was a friend who put this handle into the hands of Lockhart and Wilson who sheltered themselves behind a cowardly anonymity. It had been thought that the 'Mother of Mischief' would handle *Endymion* gently in spite of the threat of an attack in October, 1817, on the 'amiable but infatuated bardling.' Christie, an intimate friend of Lockhart, had met Keats in London and written favourably of him. In reply to his letter Lockhart had said that if Christie would write a short review of him 'in admonition to leave his ways etc and in praise of his natural genius' he would publish it. Then Bailey had gone north to his curacy in Cumberland and during the summer had stayed at Stirling with Bishop Gleig. There he met Lockhart and pleaded with him on Keats's behalf, telling him that his connection with Leigh Hunt was a private one and in no way political; he told him something of Keats's early life, asking that this information should be regarded as a confidence. Lockhart replied that certainly it should not be used by *him*. This is the version of the story given by Archdeacon Bailey to Lord Houghton in 1849, but to Taylor on August 29th of this year he told a different story. He said nothing about the revelation of Keats's early years, merely saying he had defended him against an attack during dinner. He did not mention Lockhart's name but called him 'a man in Scotland who is concerned in that publication' (*Blackwood's*). He had said to 'the man' that he supposed Keats

would be attacked and he had replied 'not by me,' implying that he would be attacked by someone else. Thus Bailey disingenuously paved the way for the attack and dexterously shielded himself from the reproach of causing Keats to be dubbed 'apothecary's boy,' since this half-confession would be taken by his candid friend as a full one. It would seem as if Bailey let his tongue run away with him. It is only fair to add that he did try to make amends. He called on Mr. Blackwood and told him roundly that his conduct was 'infamous.' He asked to be allowed to print a letter in his journal in defence of Keats but Blackwood refused. Bailey then wrote an article in defence of his friend and attacking *Blackwood's* and sent it to Constable's *Edinburgh Magazine*, but it was rejected.

*Endymion* was dismissed as 'calm, settled, imperturbable drivelling.' Hunt's prediction of the future greatness of Keats in the *Examiner* was referred to as 'precocious adulation' which

confirmed the wavering apprentice in his desire to quit the gallipots, and at the same time excited in his too susceptible mind a fatal admiration for the character and talents of the most worthless and affected of all the versifiers of our time.

Hunt was called the author of the 'odious and incestuous "Story of Rimini."' Keats's youthful praise in the 1817 volume of Hunt and Haydon was ridiculed:

The nations are to listen and be dumb! and why, good Johnny Keats? because Leigh Hunt is the editor of the *Examiner*, and Haydon has painted the judgment of Solomon, and you and Cornelius Webb, and a few more city sparks, are pleased to look upon yourselves as so many future Shakespeares and Miltons! The world has really some reason to look to its foundations!

They 'roasted' Keats for his young unwary utterances about high poetic aims in 'Sleep and Poetry.' His attack on Pope was called the reviling of a flimsy and uneducated stripling. Then they turned their attention to the group of juvenile verses in the 1817 volume:

From some verses addressed to various individuals of the other sex, it appears that Johnny's affections are not entirely confined to objects purely ethereal.

Taking the lines from the verses in the 1817 volume addressed To \* \* \* \*, referring to the girl's breasts 'like two twin lillies' and

The little loves that fly  
Round about with eager pry.

they called them 'prurient and vulgar lines, evidently meant for some lady east of Temple-bar.'

In *Endymion* 'Cockney rhymes,' and the 'loose, nerveless versification' were condemned as Huntian but

Mr. Hunt is a small poet, but he is a clever man. Mr. Keats is a still smaller poet, and he is only a boy of pretty abilities, which he has done everything in his power to spoil. *Endymion* . . . has as much to do with Greece as it has with "old Tartary the fierce."

They quoted a good deal but ignored the finest passages, making much of the 'mawkish' lines, and ended with:

It is a better and a wiser thing to be a starved apothecary than a starved poet; so back to the shop Mr. John, back to the "plasters, pills, and ointment boxes," &c. But, for Heaven's sake, young Sangrado, be a little more sparing of extenuatives and soporifics in your practice than you have been in your poetry.

Keats had said that if *Blackwood's* attacked him he should be compelled to call the writer out, but it was impossible to challenge a ghost, a shadow. These two cowards had refused to come forward to any of the *Examiner's* taunts or threats.

When in early 1824 this review came into George's hands his anger was deep. He wrote to Dilke that 'a cudgelling should have been his (Blackwood's) reward if he had been within my reach; John was the very soul of courage and manliness, and as much like the *holy Ghost*, as *Johnny Keats*.'

The attack had one pretty sequel. An admirer in Devon sent Keats a sonnet beginning

Star of high promise!—not to this dark age  
Do thy mild light and loveliness belong;—

and predicting fame through the ages. At the end was a direction to 'turn over.' He turned over and found a banknote for twenty-five pounds. He wrote to George in America: 'This appears to me all very proper—if I had

refused it—I should have behaved in a very bragadochio dunder-headed manner—’ But the present ‘galls him a little’ and he is not sure that, if ever he should meet with the donor, he would not return it.

The sonnet and note were sent through Taylor and Hessey and in the case of non-delivery were to be returned to a ‘Mr. P. Fenbank P.O. Teignmouth.’ Mr. Blunden has suggested that ‘Mr. P. Fenbank’ was Richard Woodhouse, who had taken this roundabout way of sending the gift that Keats should not suspect any of his friends and feel hurt in his pride. When Keats was setting out on his last voyage to Italy Woodhouse gave him a letter in which he pressed him to call on him for money if he needed it and ending,

“one, whose hand will never scant  
From his poor store of fruits all *thou* canst want.”—

These are the two last lines of the sonnet sent in 1818 by ‘Mr. P. O. Fenbank.’

Taylor, fearing for an adverse criticism in the *Quarterly*, had called upon the editor to ask him not to review *Endymion* in a political partisan spirit. The saturnine William Gifford received him with cold civility and Taylor carried away no hope of mercy. Gifford gave the book for review to John Wilson Croker, a die-hard in the Popean school. Haydon had also made an attempt to soften the editor’s heart: he had begged Mrs. Hoppner, the wife of the artist and a friend of Gifford’s, to go and see him. In Haydon’s own words:

She told me she found him writing with his green shade before his eyes, totally insensible to all reproach or entreaty. “How can you, Gifford, dish up in this dreadful manner a youth who has never offended you?” “It has done him good,” replied Gifford; “he has had £25 from Devonshire.” Mrs. Hoppner was extremely intimate with Gifford, and she told me she had a great mind to snatch the manuscript from the table and throw it in the fire. She left Gifford in a great passion, but without producing the least effect.

Haydon was confusing the two attacks in the Tory organs and he has not made it clear whether this call was made after or before the review came out. The circumstances, however, are not here so important as the atmosphere of implacability he evokes. How telling is that touch of the green shade!

The review was in a copy of the journal dated April, but appearing in the dilatory editorial manner of that time in September. Croker professed to find *Endymion* unreadable :

we have made efforts almost as superhuman as the story appears to be, to get through it . . . we have not been able to struggle beyond the first book.

He was unable to get the meaning of even the first book.

It is not that Mr. Keats (if that be his real name, for we almost doubt that any man in his senses would put his real name to such a rhapsody), it is not, we say, that the author has not powers of language, rays of fancy, and gleams of genius—he has all these ; but he is unhappily a disciple of the new school of what has been somewhere called the Cockney poetry ; which may be defined to consist of the most incongruous ideas in the most uncouth language . . . this author is a copyist of Mr. Hunt ; but he is more unintelligible, almost as rugged, twice as diffuse, and ten times more tiresome and absurd than his prototype, who . . . generally had a meaning.

He quoted the unwise admission in the preface of 'great inexperience, immaturity and every error denoting a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished,' and professed to see no meaning even in this. Quoting 'The two first books, and indeed the two last, I feel sensible are not of such completion as to warrant their passing the press,' Croker quite reasonably commented that if that were Keats's own estimate of the work the first book will suffice to give him an idea of the whole. He would have spared him the 'fierce hell' of criticism if he 'had not begged to be spared that he might write more.' To a writer as young, criticism would be salutary in putting him 'in the right way.' The story 'seems to be mythological,' but he could not grasp it :

At first it appeared to us, that Mr. Keats had been amusing himself with *bouts-rimés* ; but, if we recollect rightly, it was an indispensable condition at this play, that the rhymes when filled up shall have a meaning . . . our author . . . has no meaning. . . . There is hardly a complete couplet inclosing a complete idea in the whole book.

He continued to criticise in his old-fashioned way, making wilful nonsense of some of the opening lines, picking out

'new words' coined 'in imitation of Leigh Hunt,' and including among them Elizabethan words. He ended with the promise that if anyone bought *Endymion* and got beyond the first book and found a meaning he would, if that person informed him of his success, 'return to the task, which we now abandon with despair, and endeavour to make all due amends to Mr. Keats and to our readers.'

There may have been some party-bias in this, but it was probably, so far as it went, a genuine criticism. The ears of the old-fashioned Croker, whom Hazlitt irreverently called the 'Talking Potato,' were accustomed to this :

TWILIGHT's soft dews steal o'er the village-green,  
With magic tints to harmonize the scene.  
Stilled is the hum that thro' the hamlet broke,  
When round the ruins of their ancient oak  
The peasants flocked to hear the minstrel play,  
And games and carols closed the busy day.

The above is the opening to 'The Pleasures of Memory' by the last of the 'silk-stocking' poets of the eighteenth century, Samuel Rogers. It is no wonder that when Croker came upon this,

A THING of beauty is a joy for ever :  
Its loveliness increases ; it will never  
Pass into nothingness ; but still will keep  
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep  
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.

he felt it was all wrong. We can parallel his bewilderment with that of at least one of our own elderly critics at the work of, say, Mr. Spender or Mr. Auden.

The criticism of the *Quarterly* was countered on October 11th by an article in the *Alfred, West of England Journal*, the Exeter paper, by Reynolds, attributing party rancour :

no one but a Lottery Commissioner and Government Pensioner (both of which Mr. William Gifford, the Editor of the *Quarterly Review*, is) could, with a false and remorseless pen, have striven to frustrate hopes and aims, so youthful and so high as this young poet nurses.

To an enthusiastic praise of Keats he added quotations from some of the loveliest passages. But the *Alfred* was a provincial

organ; though the article might have helped sales locally it could have little effect against the blarings of the *Quarterly* and *Blackwood's*. There was also a well-written laudatory paragraph in the *Chester Guardian*. The writer thought *Endymion* likely to be 'caviar to the general' but containing, apart from the finer joy to be extracted from it by classical scholars, many beauties within the comprehension of the lesser informed. He attacked the *Quarterly's* 'contemptible piece of flippancy' intended to 'put down' the young Liberal aspirant.

Two letters were written to the editor of the *Morning Chronicle* in protest against the bitterness of the *Quarterly* critique. The first was signed J. S. In it the writer suggested that the 'Admiralty Scribe' (Croker was Secretary to the Admiralty Board) should 'compare the "Battle of Talavera" with "Endymion."' The poem suggested for comparison was by Croker himself. The second letter was signed R. B. and came from the Temple. The writer contented himself by giving quotations from the one book handled by Croker and leaving the reader to 'judge whether the Critic who could pass over such beauties as these . . . is very implicitly to be relied on.'

To my mind, apart from the personal attack on Keats in *Blackwood's*, the vilest of the adverse reviews was that in the *British Critic* of June, 1818, the organ of the powerful Tory Church party. It began: 'This is the most delicious poem, of its kind, which has fallen to our notice,' leading the unwary reader to expect a favourable critique. It continued in the old weariful way of reference to Hunt and then embarked on an ill-written, garbled and nonsensical account of *Endymion*, misquoting lines and making sheer balderdash of the story. The quality of the 'humour' of the writer can be gathered from such sentences as these: "'there blossom'd suddenly a magic bed of sacred ditamy" (Qu. dimity?); ' . . . he fell into a "stupid sleep" from which he was roused by "a gentle creep." (N.B.—Mr. Tiffin is the ablest bug-destroyer of our days).' The lines:

Who lov'st to see the hamadryads dress  
Their ruffled locks where meeting hazels darken;



he mauled in 'Pan was a god "who loves to see the Hamadryads dress."' Of the 'mawkish' passages he said, with the typical prudery of a dirty-minded man :

not all the flimsy veil of words in which he would involve immoral images, can atone for the impurity ; and we will not disgust our readers by retailing to them the artifices of vicious refinement, by which, under the semblance of "slippery blisses, twinkling eyes, soft completion of faces, and smooth excess of hands," he would palm upon the unsuspecting and the innocent, imaginations better adapted to the stews.

The review ended :

We do most solemnly assure our readers that this poem, containing 4074 lines, is printed on very nice hot-pressed paper, and sold for 9/- by a very respectable London bookseller. Moreover, as the Author has put his name in the title page, and told us, that though he is something between man and boy, he means by and by to be "plotting and fitting himself for verses fit to live." We think it necessary to add that it is all written in rhyme, and for the most part, (when there are syllables enough) in the heroic couplet.

This was a high-handed journal. In a May issue it had dismissed Canto IV of *Childe Harold* with the comment, 'it would do very well for an ordinary prize poem at the University.'

The *Literary Journal* for May 17th and 24th had a friendly and understanding review with copious quotation. The reviewer took up the volume with a feeling of distaste for 'In this *poetixing* age we are led to look with an eye of suspicion on every work savouring of rhyme.' He failed to respond to the first thirty lines and then he began to elevate his 'critical eye-brows' and he exclaimed : 'And this is poetry !' The passage in which Glaucus hails Endymion as the man who is to release him from his thousand years of decrepitude he quotes, saying that it 'will strongly remind the reader of the rapturous exclamations of Ariel, when promised his freedom by Prospero.' There seems to be no parallel passage in *The Tempest*, but the writer has probably run together a recollection of the song, 'Where the bee sucks' and Ariel's words :

That's my noble master !  
What shall I do ? say what ; what shall I do ?

which has something of the movement of four lines of Glaucus’ speech :

O Jove ! I shall be young again, be young !  
O shell-borne Neptune, I am pierc’d and stung  
With new-born life ! What shall I do ? Where go,  
When I have cast this serpent-skin of woe ?

The writer of course could not keep Mr. Hunt out but he said :

The measure of this poem, which is so nearly allied to that of Chaucer, frequently reminds us of Mr. Hunt’s “ Rimini ”, though many of the faults so justly attributed to that author, have been avoided in the present work. Indeed, with the exception of two passages, we are induced to give our most unqualified approbation of this poem : and first,

. . . The sleeping kine  
Couch’d in thy brightness, dream of fields divine :

This may be a very happy thought, and extremely poetical ; but in our finite judgment, the giving to the brute creation one of the greatest and most glorious attributes of a rational being, is not only very ridiculous, but excessively impious.

A richly period touch ! The review ended in this graceful compliment :

And from the following passage we dissent most decidedly, as we feel persuaded, that genius, like that possessed by Mr. K., may with safety venture in the highest walks of poetry :

O ’tis very sin  
For one so weak to venture his poor verse  
In such a place as this. O do not curse,  
High Muses ! let him hurry to the ending.

On June 8th there was an excellent review in *The Champion*, probably by John Scott, saying that the notice had been delayed intentionally so as not to injure *Endymion* with the ‘ great critical authorities.’ The writer demanded fair reviews on sound principles : he himself ‘ cares not two straws for public opinion.’ He thought *Endymion* too good to have a popular success and compared Keats with the great poets. He quoted a good deal, giving the Hymn to Pan almost in

full and declaring it to be 'among the finest specimens of classic poetry in our language.' Referring to the lines :

Fair creatures ! whose young children's children bred  
Thermopylæ its heroes—not yet dead,  
But in old marbles ever beautiful.

he pronounced the last line 'as fine as that in Shakespeare's sonnets, "And beauty making beautiful old rhyme"' (Sonnet 106), adding, 'And there are not a dozen finer in Shakespeare's poems.' The review was unfinished; a conclusion was promised for a future issue, but did not appear.

It is a matter to regret that we have no criticism from Hunt. Although his feelings in regard to *Endymion* were mixed, even one of his skilled 'special pleadings' would have been of literary value; but he knew that a notice from his pen could only do harm to the book with the great Tory organs. He reprinted in full, however, the notice in the *Chester Guardian* and Reynolds's long article. He referred to the *Quarterly* review in a footnote :

We congratulate most *sincerely*, our young friend JOHN KEATS on the involuntary homage that, we understand, has been paid to his undoubted genius, in an article full of grovelling abuse.

He also commented on J. S.'s letter protesting against a certain 'half-witted, half-hearted Review' in the *Quarterly*. J. S. had remarked ironically that Mr. Keats might attain to praise from the *Quarterly* if he would give up 'his friendships, his principles, and his politics.' On this Leigh Hunt commented: 'We really believe so; but Mr. Keats is of a spirit which can afford to dispense with such approbation, and stand by his friend.'

Of private opinions we have very few except the partial admiration of close friends. We know that Shelley found it difficult to get through, though later he could enjoy 'the treasures of poetry it contains.' The Hymn to Pan he thought on first reading 'the surest promise of ultimate excellence.' A friend of Woodhouse's in Bath said, in reference to the passages quoted in derision in the *Quarterly* review: 'If these are the worst passages what can the best be?' There is also a letter, dated March 29th, 1819, from a lady to Woodhouse which runs :



LEIGH HUNT

From a portrait by Samuel Lawrence.



Mrs. Colonel Green's Compliments to Mr. Woodhouse and feels exceedingly obliged to Mr. W. for the perusal of *Endymion* and the other trifle. There are a great many beauties in the *former* which speaks highly for the Author's growing genius. A stranger perhaps might fancy him too *wild* in some of his passages, but Mrs. G, knowing the author at a time when the Fire of his imagination appeared agitated with a Thirst for *fame*—can easily excuse him *for the*—sudden outbursts of enthusiasm which pervades his *affectionate Constitution*.

Should Mrs. G. ever see the author, She certainly must rally him—for a great Mistake committed in the Book of Trifles & which *by this time* he must be a very great Judge. Mrs. G. begs to be kindly remembered to him and should at all times be happy to see both Mr. Woodhouse and the Author of *Endymion*.

We know no more of this lively and slightly incoherent lady beyond that she lived at Duncan Terrace, Islington. The letter might suggest a lively flirtation with Keats at an earlier period.

Charlotte Reynolds, staying in 1820 with Mrs. Neville (Mary Frogley), at Esher, met some ladies who refused to see any beauty in *Endymion* or, indeed, in any of Keats's writings. She tried them with 'that beautiful and grand sonnet to the "Sea,"' and when that failed to interest them she 'gave them up as lost *muttons*.'

Through the Nevilles Keats received a tribute from the Misses Porter popular writers of the day. Jane Porter, the author of *Scottish Chiefs*, wrote the letter, the main part of which Keats copied out in the letter to America of December 16th. She and her sister were 'very much delighted' with *Endymion*. He did not quote the end of the letter which spoke of genius which 'always burns its brilliant way thro' every obstacle,' and expressed in rather high-falutin tones regret that Chatterton had not the manliness of mind or 'the magnanimity of patience' to live and fulfil his high destiny. On the letter he commented :

Now I feel more obliged than flattered by this—so obliged that I will not at present give you an extravaganza of a Lady Romancer.

This seems a little ungrateful, especially as the lady had taken the trouble to write when she was very unwell with a 'still adhæsiue cold.' Keats's attitude to the women writers

of his day was expressed in a letter to Reynolds on September 21st, 1817 :

The world, and especially our England, has, within the last thirty years been vexed and teased by a set of Devils, whom I detest so much that I almost hunger after an acherontic promotion to a Torturer, purposely for their accommodation. These Devils are a set of women, who having taken a snack or Luncheon of Literary scraps, set themselves up for towers of Babel in Languages Sapphos in Poetry—Euclids in Geometry—and everything in nothing. . . . I had longed for some real feminine Modesty in these things, and was therefore gladdened in the extreme on opening the other day . . . a Book of Poetry written by . . . “the matchless Orinda.”

He then quoted in full the poem to her friend, Mrs. Awbrey.

Keats was at this time living in Well Walk. Had he encountered Mrs. Joanna Baillie, the then-famous author and dramatist who was considered to give literary distinction to Hampstead by her residence at Bolton House? In the irony of fate *The Times*, at her death, called her ‘a poet whose fame is indelibly inscribed on literature.’ How astonished she and her blue-stocking friends would have been to know that an obscure young man living in lodgings in Well Walk would so completely eclipse her light! Although Keats disliked her kind and would have probably included among the ‘Devils’ her more didactic friend, Mrs. Barbauld, he might have found himself in agreement with the latter on one point; ‘young ladies ought to have such a general tincture of knowledge as to make them agreeable companions for a man of sense, and to enable them to find rational entertainment for a solitary hour.’

An opinion of real literary value is that expressed by Sir James Mackintosh, publicist, historian, statesman and philosopher, one of the original contributors to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and a man who had a reputation for multifarious reading and learning. He was an advanced liberal who worked in the cause of the reform of the criminal code, Catholic Emancipation and the Reform Bill. He was now fifty-three and had just been appointed Professor of Law and General Politics in the East India Company’s college at Haileybury. Taylor wrote to him in the December of 1818, sending a copy of *Endymion* with this comment, ‘its faults are numberless,’ but they are those of ‘real Genius.’ He men-

tioned Keats's age, that he was an orphan and gave particulars of his brothers and sister :

These are odd particulars to give, when I am introducing the work and not the man to you,—but if you knew him, you would also feel that strange personal interest in all that concerns him.

Commending the finest passages to Sir James, he asserted that 'if he lives, Keats will be the brightest ornament of this Age.' He did not mention that Keats had been destined for a medical career. This might have had a personal interest for Sir James who had been a doctor, but had given up his practice because a stronger interest had absorbed his attention.

Sir James Mackintosh openly protested against the mode of criticism employed against *Endymion*. He wrote in a letter to an unknown correspondent: 'such attacks will interest every liberal mind in the author's success.' To Taylor he wrote, in July, 1819: 'I very much admire your young poet, with all his singularities. Where is he? and what high design does he meditate?' The admiration of this highly intelligent public man is all the more pleasing because he had been a doctor: it is the first instance of the strong interest taken in Keats by medical men down to our own day.

If Taylor's ulterior motive in sending *Endymion* to Sir James Mackintosh had been to elicit the active sympathy of the *Edinburgh Review* he was not successful. The great Liberal organ made no sound. Keats's comment was: 'The cowardliness of the *Edinburgh* is worse than the abuse of the *Quarterly*.'

The Edinburgh review are afraid to touch upon my Poem. They do not know what to make of it—they do not like to condemn it and they will not praise it for fear—They are as shy of it as I should be of wearing a Quaker's hat. The fact is they have no real taste—they dare not compromise their Judgements on so puzzling a Question. If on my next Publication they should praise me and so lug in *Endymion*—I will address them in a manner they will not at all relish.

This was exactly what did happen but the Keats of 1820 was too ill and dispirited to make his protest.

When in 1820 Jeffrey himself reviewed *Endymion* he said there was probably no other book he would 'sooner employ as a test to ascertain whether any one had in him a native



relish for poetry.' There was one man of letters who would have dissented heartily from this, Thomas de Quincey. On the subject of *Endymion* he was vigorous: 'The very mid-summer madness of affectation, of false vapoury sentiment, and of fantastic effeminacy, seemed to me combined in Keats's *Endymion*, when I first saw it near the end of 1821. The Italian poet Marino has been reputed the greatest master of gossamery affectation in Europe. But *his* conceits showed the palest of rosy blushes by the side of Keats's bloody crimson.'

The admirer most useful to posterity was the young lawyer, Richard Woodhouse. He had each volume of Keats's published works interleaved, wrote in them explanatory notes and alternative readings and kept copies of unpublished poems. He called it his 'collection of Keatsiana,' and he was anxious to include complimentary sonnets to Keats, though he sometimes had to get them in a roundabout way. Probably Keats himself was both embarrassed and amused by Woodhouse's consideration for posterity.

Among Keats's presentation copies of *Endymion* was one to Hazlitt who made the blank leaf serve for one of his effusions to the heroine of the *Liber Amoris*. The little lodging-house flirt was no fit bedfellow for Peona or Cynthia, but the imagination can transform and at least she was rare and lovely in the eyes of the infatuated Hazlitt.

A few more copies of *Endymion* were sold on the comparative success of the 1820 volume, but the main body of the edition languished unwanted and unbound on Taylor's shelves. Eventually Edward Stibbs, a bookseller, bought the remainder at a penny-halfpenny a copy, paid twopence-halfpenny for the binding and sold it very slowly at eighteenpence. In 1933 a dealer paid two thousand, four hundred pounds for a presentation copy of *Endymion*.

But in May, 1818, these disappointments, the shock of these attacks, were still to come. Keats, relieved that the long poem he had laboured on for so many months was published and behind him, was busy in Hampstead preparing for his brother's wedding and emigration. He was in that state of mind when action is mechanical and the world profitless, but he looked forward to a pleasure to come. He was going, after George's departure, on a walking-tour in the north with that congenial companion, Charles Brown.

## CHAPTER XIV

### *George's Departure and the Walking-Tour (May-August, 1818)*

GEORGE WAS TO BE MARRIED AT THE END OF MAY AND TO start in the middle of June on his long, hazardous journey to Louisville, Kentucky, in the backwoods of America. He was going equipped with more enthusiasm than experience and risking most of his available capital, one thousand one hundred pounds. He took with him, however, letters of introduction from Taylor who had a cousin in Philadelphia.

It would seem dangerous enough for an untravelled youth of twenty-one without, so far as we know, any experience of farming, to go alone as settler into a strange country, but sheer madness to take with him a wife of sixteen. Most of the mutual friends of the Keatses and Wylies regarded the scheme as, to say the least of it, highly imprudent. Mrs. Reynolds was definite in her disapproval. Dilke, curiously enough, was the only one to applaud the enterprise of the young couple. Mrs. Wylie was very naturally blamed for allowing her young daughter to go. But these were times when men took risks in the new lands and it was the duty of their women to share them. Perhaps Mrs. Wylie made her private protest. Georgiana was a high-spirited girl and may well have taken the law in her own hands. Youth does not see difficulties and dangers in adventure; but one would like to know something of the young girl's feelings when she bore her first child within a year of her marriage, far away from her mother and friends. At first Georgiana was not happy among the people of her adoption and she does not seem ever to have felt quite at home in America. However, she settled down and lived to bear eight children, take a second husband and to enjoy a lively old age.<sup>1</sup> Miss Alice Keats, her grand-

<sup>1</sup> She died at Lexington, Kentucky, April 5th, 1879.

daughter, tells us that she was 'rather severe with little children whom she liked to behave properly.' Somewhere about the middle of the century she wrote to Mrs. Dilke advising her not to let her son marry too soon as 'it is so unpleasant to be called Grandmamma. I have a perfect horror of it, and am as much disposed to gaiety as ever.'

Keats was willing that George, who had been 'more than a brother to him,' who was 'his greatest friend,' should go temporarily out of his life. 'He is,' he said, 'of too independant and liberal a Mind to get on in trade in this Country—in which a generous Man with a scanty recourse must be ruined. I would sooner he should till the ground than bow to a Customer—there is no choice with him—he could not bring himself to the latter.'

This attitude of George's must have been inexplicable to the good Abbey. What should a tradesman do but bow to a customer? And at that time if he were an aristocratic one you bowed very low. It would seem highly improper pride in the son of a livery-stable keeper to keep a stiff back; a pride which could only be attributed to the dangerous Jacobinical notions the boys had got into their heads.

Keats did not anticipate a long separation from his brother. He planned, if he were alive, to pay him a visit within three years. These hints of the fear of an early death may be taken as portents, as a foreknowledge of incipient tubercular trouble, but they may have been merely a reflection of the all too frequent deaths of young men. The expectation of life was considerably lower than it is to-day. It was, too, a characteristic of the morbid side of the romantic movement to lay an emphasis on death.

In speaking of his sister-in-law to Bailey Keats wrote :

To see an entirely disinterested Girl quite happy is the most pleasant and extraordinary thing in the world—it depends upon a thousand Circumstances—on my word 'tis extraordinary. Women must want Imagination and they may thank God for it—and so may we that a delicate being can feel happy without any sense of crime. It puzzles me and I have no sort of logic to comfort me—I shall think it over.

It might well have astonished him that Georgiana could let her present happiness swamp all consideration of the future

dangers his vivid imagination and his medical experience might foresee : and, weighed down as he was by ' the burden of the mystery,' that any human being could find even temporarily unalloyed happiness. He was not in love himself.

On June 22nd he, Brown, George and Georgiana set out on the coach for Liverpool from the Swan with Two Necks in Lad Lane, now Gresham Street. At Redbourne near St. Albans, Henry Stephens, now in practice there, came to see them while they took dinner at the inn. He has given us an account of the meeting and this description of the young bride :

Rather short, not what might be called strictly handsome, but looked like a being whom any man of moderate sensibility might easily love. She had an imaginative poetical cast. Somewhat singular and girlish in her attire. . . . There was something original about her, and John seemed to regard her as a being whom he delighted to honour, and introduced her with evident satisfaction.

' Girlish in her attire. . . . ' She must have been well developed for her age as Stephens does not seem to have guessed how young she was. We may picture her in a fullish muslin gown with the waist under her armpits and perhaps in the dark cloth spencer which gave a slim girl a child-like appearance. She might wear either a ' coal-scuttle ' bonnet of moderate dimensions or a rustic straw hat tied under the chin with ribbons. „If she were over-young as helpmeet to a pioneer, she evidently had character enough to impress a stranger.

The young couple settled down at the Crown Inn, Liverpool to await the sailing of their ship. The last good-byes were said over night. Keats and Brown took coach in the morning for Lancaster (one of the recognised starting-off points for a tour of the Lakes) before the young couple were awake. As he bowled along on top of the coach was Keats thinking, not only of his brother George and his new sister, but of Tom in his lonely Hampstead lodging ? We know that Keats did not want to leave him, but Tom had seemed to be much improved in health ; indeed, his doctor had been amazed to see how well he looked on his return from Teignmouth. Dr. Sawrey and some of Tom's friends, no doubt with the best of intentions, teased Tom, telling him that he wasn't really ill at all, and made him laugh so much that he was temporarily quite unwell. However, they

managed to put into his mind that 'confinement and low spirits' had been 'his chief enemies,' and to infuse into him a hope of recovery which soon buoyed him up again. He was not, however, apparently fit for much exertion for he used to 'lounge on the Walk opposite' with Keats who himself was far from well and was for a time under the doctor. In a lively letter to the Misses Jeffrey, Keats wrote: 'Tom is taken for a Madman and I being somewhat stunted am taken for nothing—We lounge on the Walk opposite as you might on the Den.' With the typical irony of our English climate it had become fine and warm now they had left Teignmouth. Tom was himself planning to go on holiday during John's intended absence of four months, and even to live for a time in a foreign land. He told the Misses Jeffrey in May that he hoped to 'go by vessell to some port in the Adriatic or down the Rhine through Switzerland and the Alps into Italy most like the town of Pavia—there to remain untill I have acquired a stock of Knowledge and strength which will better enable me to bustle through the world.' Whether this was a settled possibility in the minds of the brothers or merely the dream of a sick boy we do not know. We have seen earlier how Keats himself had been planning to travel on the Continent and perhaps he had meant to join Tom before the winter. But if in the meantime Tom were not able to travel himself, he would be able to enjoy his brother's tour at second-hand in long journal letters, and to have the solace of a supply of books from Taylor's hospitable shop.

However, even though he might have felt tolerably secure in leaving Tom in the care of Mrs. Bentley and under the kindly supervision of friends, Keats must have been thinking of him with some regret as he went off away from his family with Brown. Brown, an eminently tactful man, would leave him to his thoughts. He had attached Keats to him as friend by not pushing his claim; by making him feel at liberty to frequent his house without directly mentioning how much he enjoyed his company.

Brown kept a diary of the walking-tour. He published in 1840, in the *Plymouth and Devonport Weekly Journal*, four instalments of an account of it, based on this diary. Unfortunately these only carry us up to Ballantrae in Ayrshire: the diary itself has not come to light.

They found Lancaster preparing for a parliamentary election. There was great excitement in the town. Brougham, the great Whig lawyer, had dared to challenge the traditional right of the Tory family of Lowther to the monopoly of the seat. Lord Lowther, fearing for more than the usual turmoil and trouble an election meant in those days of public balloting, had induced the Government to send soldiers up. The troops were at present being kept at a discreet distance from the scene of action. It seems as if industrial troubles were adding fuel to the smouldering fire of discontent over delays in electoral reform: Parson Newton of Wath, who visited Lancaster later in the summer of 1818, tells us that Lancaster was almost a dead port; there were only three vessels in harbour, grass grew along the quay walls and the bridge was broken.

Drink flowed freely on these occasions and ruffians collected in and about the town alert for mischief. The inns were full of carousing visitors. Keats and Brown had to wait two hours for their dinner. They retired for the night with some relief in a private house. They arose at the Spartan hour of four o'clock in the morning to find it pouring with rain: they read and talked Milton until seven. Milton at four in the morning! Perhaps even Keats's enthusiasm for poetry was not equal to this, for he was restless and impatient. Brown, no doubt with his spectacles twinkling, preached patience out of *Samson Agonistes*. When the rain subsided into a Scotch mist they 'chose to consider it appropriate and complimentary,' and set out. Just as they left the town they heard a labourer observe with some sarcasm:

'There go a couple of gentlemen! Having nothing to do, they're finding out hard work for themselves.'

They walked four miles of muddy road to Bolton-le-Sands and fortunately secured breakfast there before the rain descended once more. The local weather prophets told them it would be wet all day, but, as so often happens in hilly country, the clouds suddenly and unexpectedly cleared at midday and they set off again. They were walking towards that long arm of the mountains that stretches down to the sea in Morecambe Bay and two miles ahead of Bolton they had their first fine view. The still hovering clouds lent a misty charm to the horizon. At Burton they turned into the Green Dragon,

asking impatiently what they could have for dinner. A voice replied in a 'gruff-and-grum' tone :

"Nothing ! You can have nothing here !"

'It was the Green Dragon himself, in the shape of a tall corpulent figure, with the largest face that ever man was blessed with, a face like a target ; and one that a starving traveller would be tempted to shoot at.' This 'unfeeling lump' told the hungry men that his house was full of soldiers and that he could do nothing for them. They secured a dinner at the King's Arms where a voluble landlady lamented that she could not offer them a bed as her house too was army-ridden ; she had even had to refuse two parties of carriage folk. So after dinner they had reluctantly to step out into the rain again. Protected by their oilskin capes, they trudged along towards Kendal. Wet and discouraged they welcomed the sight of a dirty little road-side inn, only to be repelled by a formidable landlady, smoking a pipe, who said she too was full. She told them of a wayside house at a hamlet called End Moor, and here again, after more muddy, rain-splashed walking, they found a cold welcome. The landlady, Mrs. Black, eyeing their knapsacks, took them for poor travellers who would not have the price of a meal on them. However, after being assured that they did not carry their own food, she warmed visibly and said she would give them a lodging, although her house was all in a 'squeer' from a general whitewashing.

They spent the evening in the kitchen, the general room of the inn, with the landlady, her son, an old soldier who yarned about the late Wars, and a man 'as drunk as a sponge.' The drunkard, fortunately for their comfort, took himself off early after staggering out of his corner and lunging at Brown with an enquiry as to the wares he carried. Did he sell spectacles and razors ? Walking-tours were unusual at this time and the two pedestrians were constantly being taken for pedlars. Brown was thought to be a spectacle-seller, the pair on his nose being taken for a badge of his trade. On finding out his mistake the old toper made sudden and profuse apologies, whispering in Brown's ear :

"I never offend any man, not I ! so if you'll give me something to drink, why, I'll take it !"

Finding that this broad hint fell upon stony ground he stumbled out of the inn, mumbling and hiccupping.

As Keats and Brown took tea after their supper Mrs. Black noted that they took no sugar. This astonished and pleased her, and she pointed out to her son how economical it was. Did the two men abstain from sugar as a protest against the slave-trade? This was not unusual. However, no such motive came within the landlady's simple ken; only the economy of the habit impressed her. The next morning, on their departure, she wanted to take something off their reckoning as she had not been obliged to supply them with the then expensive item of sugar.

They awoke with relief to a day which, although dull, was fine. They walked to Kendal and thence down to the shores of Windermere. The larks overhead and the fresh mountain air filled them with delight amongst the wild, unfamiliar scenery; scenery which Brown, whose narrative is in the familiar ecstatic style of the period, calls 'romantic.' Before they descended to the hamlet of Bowness on the shores of the lake they both stopped short. Windermere lay spread beneath them against the rugged elevation of the peaked mountains. A little island thick with feathery trees lay immediately below, lapped by the clear water. Keats's bright eyes darted up to a mountain-peak 'beneath which was gently resting a silver cloud' and back again to the faery island.

"How can I believe that?" he exclaimed. "There could be no view in the world, no, not even in Italy, to beat it." They walked on until they could see the end of the lake and he thought it 'more and more wonderfully beautiful.' The fern and the bright furze, the clustering trees, before them the mountains, and the living, moving water. . . . It was a scene the beauty of which, intensified through the eyes of the young poet he had loved, lingered long in Brown's memory. The greyness of the day only added a softened grace to the landscape by a light mist before the mountains. This was the first time Keats had seen a mountain with the exception of a distant view of the Welsh mountains on their way up to Liverpool. To the dullest of us it is an amazing experience. Brown, in his narrative, dilated on the awe-inspiring quality of the mountain scene and burst into poetic quotation, but Keats, with his usual reticence, was content to write in his journal-letter to Tom: 'I have an amazing partiality for mountains in the clouds.'



It was now time for dinner and they walked into Bowness. They found the inn there 'spacious and flourishing under the patronage of tourists; for whom the whole conduct was as much after the London fashion as possible.' A man was putting off in a boat to fetch fish for dinner and they went with him. To their surprise he merely hauled up some fishing-pots, wooden cages in which the salmon trout were jumping alive. They enjoyed a hasty bathe while the trout were cooking.

The luxury of the inn and its modern furnishing offended the two romantics who yearned for more of sylvan simplicity. Then, as now, the presence of gaping tourists marred the enjoyment of the beauty-spot; though one is glad to think Keats was spared the orange-peel, paper-bag and cigarette carton mess made by modern char-a-banc trippers. He told Tom :

There are many disfigurements to this Lake—not in the way of land or water. No; the two views we have had of it are of the most noble tenderness—they can never fade away—they make one forget the divisions of life; age, youth, poverty and riches; and refine one's sensual vision into a sort of north star which can never cease to be open lidded and steadfast over the wonders of the great Power. The disfigurement I mean is the miasma of London. I do suppose it contaminated with bucks and soldiers, and women of fashion—and hatband ignorance. The border inhabitants are quite out of keeping with the romance about them, from a continual intercourse with London rank and fashion. But why should I grumble? They let me have a prime glass of soda water—

Later, when they were in the bleak and unfrequented Highlands, no doubt Keats would have given much for the ample food and drink, the comfort of the Bowness Inn: now he was but newly set out on his journey fresh and eager to rough it in the adventure of a tour on foot.

After dinner they walked along the lake to Ambleside at the northern extremity; slowly, because the beauty of the country so often stayed their steps. This walk is best given in Keats's own words :

We walked . . . along the border of Winandermere all beautiful with wooded shores and Islands—our road was a winding lane, wooded on each side, and green overhead, full of Foxgloves—every now and then a glimpse of the Lake, and all the while Kirk-

stone and other large hills nestled together in a sort of grey black mist.

The wind had arisen and the rustle of Keats's 'inland sea,' the singing of birds and the sound of the water whipped into waves and slapping against the shore added a joy of sound to the delight of the eyes. At Ambleside they met with a tiresome person, an intruder upon country quiet from London who began immediately to talk about himself in a consequential tone. Brown thought to profit by the unwelcome intrusion by asking him some practical questions about routes and lodgings, but the bore was deaf to all enquiry. He carefully explained that, although dressed roughly and suitably for walking as they were, he was a gentleman, an Oxford man, and to give the statement verisimilitude he quoted the classics. Keats had, soon after the encounter, unceremoniously walked on ahead, leaving Brown to grapple with the numbskull who went on to discourse about his uncle's carriage, Almack's and the opera and of the futile attempt of the Bowness Inn to ape a London hotel. Brown, with characteristic persistence, determined to make some use of him, asked what route he had taken. "Oh!" he replied, carelessly, "I can hardly tell you the names of the places." He slid into a glib account of how his father had traced a long pedigree, though he himself thought nothing of a silly pride of rank and birth. Numbskull he might appear to be, but Brown was beginning from his smooth patter to suspect him as 'London sharper.' He found difficulty in disentangling himself for, as he said, it was hard to be ruthless with him 'because no provocation ought to ruffle the temper of Ambleside.'

The day was crowned by a reading aloud of 'Isabella, or the Pot of Basil,' which Keats had just finished. The finishing of a poem does not, of course, necessarily mean that the poet has written the last stanza; but one would like to think that by the shores of Winandermere, to the quiet sounds of the rustling of trees outside his window, and the lapping of the water, Keats wrote:

And so she pined, and so she died forlorn,  
Imploring for her Basil to the last.  
No heart was there in Florence but did mourn  
In pity of her love, so overcast.

And a sad ditty of this story born

From mouth to mouth through all the country pass'd :

Still is the burthen sung—"O cruelty,

"To steal my Basil-pot away from me ! "

As Keats wished to call on Wordsworth during the day they got up the next morning at Ambleside to have a walk before breakfast. In Keats's own words :

... we went to see the Ambleside waterfall. The morning beautiful—the walk early among the hills. We, I may say, fortunately, missed the direct path, and after wandering a little, found it out by the noise—for, mark you, it is buried in trees, in the bottom of the valley—the stream itself is interesting throughout with "mazy error over pendant shades." Milton meant a smooth river—this is buffeting all the way on a rocky bed ever various—but the waterfall itself, which I came suddenly upon, gave me a pleasant twinge. First we stood a little below the head about half way down the first fall, buried deep in trees, and saw it streaming down two more descents to the depth of near fifty feet—then we went on a jut of rock nearly level with the second fall-head, where the first fall was above us, and the third below our feet still—at the same time we saw that the water was divided by a sort of cataract island on whose other side burst out a glorious stream—then the thunder and the freshness. At the same time the different falls have as different characters ; the first darting down the slate-rock like an arrow ; the second spreading out like a fan—the third dashed into a mist—and the one on the other side of the rock a sort of mixture of all these. We afterwards moved away a space, and saw nearly the whole more mild, streaming silverly through the trees. What astonishes me more than any thing is the tone, the coloring, the slate, the stone, the moss, the rock-weed ; or, if I may so say, the intellect, the countenance of such places. The space, the magnitude of mountains and waterfalls are well imagined before one sees them ; but this countenance or intellectual tone must surpass every imagination and defy any remembrance. I shall learn poetry here and shall henceforth write more than ever, for the abstract endeavor of being able to add a mite to that mass of beauty which is harvested from these grand materials, by the finest spirits, and put into ethereal existence for the relish of one's fellows. I cannot think with Hazlitt that these scenes make man appear little. I never forgot my stature so completely—I live in the eye ; and my imagination, surpassed, is at rest—

... 'the thunder and the freshness' ... 'streaming silverly through the trees' ... how clearly he brings before us the

sight, the sound and the moist smell of a waterfall. 'I never forgot my stature so completely. . . .' There are signs in the letters that Keats felt his lack of inches. I have wondered whether his frequent use of the word 'tip-toe' may not have had a physical cause. He must often have had to lift himself above his natural height to see what other men would have well upon the level of the eye.

In descending the waterfall, however, his slightness of figure was an advantage. Towards the level of the bottom it was necessary to grasp the trees and edges of rock to prevent a headlong tumble which might mean death or a serious injury. The older and heavier Brown followed nervously and with caution. 'I never was,' he said, 'a sure-footed beast.'

After 'a Monstrous Breakfast' they went up to Rydal Mount only to find that all the Wordsworth family were from home. Keats was very disappointed. He wrote a note for Wordsworth and put it over Dorothy's portrait while Brown admired the view from the window. His disappointment was tinged with bitterness because Wordsworth had gone to Lowther Hall to help the Tory candidate in canvassing: but in fairness to Wordsworth he admitted that the Lowthers were old friends.

After visiting another waterfall they walked along by the side of Rydal Water. After Windermere it looked small and bare to them. Brown disliked the reeds as he passed them but from a distance thought they added beauty to the lake by shadowing-in the banks. They now came in sight of Helm Crag and at once recognised

That ancient woman seated on Helm-crag

the fantastic heap of stones which look like some gigantic primitive old woman on the summit. Did they seek that 'tall rock' on 'Rotha's banks' where 'Joanna' stood with Wordsworth and laughed to see the rapt expression on the poet's face before the mountain view, when

The rock, like something starting from a sleep,  
Took up the lady's voice, and laughed again:  
That ancient woman seated on Helm-Crag  
Was ready with her cavern: Hammer-Scar,  
And the tall steep of Silver-how, sent forth  
A noise of laughter; southern Loughrigg heard,

And Fairfield answered with a mountain tone :  
 Helvellyn far into the clear blue sky  
 Carried the lady's voice,—old Skiddaw blew  
 His speaking trumpet ;—back out of the clouds  
 Of Glaramara southward came the voice :  
 And Kirkstone tossed it from his misty head.

Surely Keats was too young to resist trying to call up the echo himself.

They walked from thickly wooded Westmorland, through a long pass among treeless mountains, into Cumberland to the foot of Helvellyn which was veiled in heavy rolling clouds. Here Keats wrote to George and included in the letter an acrostic on his new sister's name. He reserved the letter for an addition the next day and went to bed. They had a restless night with fleas as bedfellows and awoke to find heavy clouds still enveloping the mountain and a drizzling rain below. They had to forgo their plan of climbing Helvellyn. When the clouds cleared a little and they were able to set out for Keswick they found the country had changed ; the mountains were now based by sloping foothills and were less craggy than in Westmorland. The entrance into Keswick Vale they thought more lovely than Windermere. They visited the Falls of Lodore which must be described in Keats's own words :

I had an easy climb among the streams, about the fragments of Rocks, and should have got I think to the summit, but unfortunately I was damped by slipping one leg into a squashy hole. There is no great body of water, but the accompaniment is delightful ; for it oozes out from a cleft in perpendicular Rocks, all fledged with Ash and other beautiful trees. It is a strange thing how they got there. At the south end of the Lake, the Mountains of Borrowdale are perhaps as fine as anything we have seen.

The ' Ash and other beautiful trees ' appear in his ' Ode to Psyche ' as the ' dark-clustered trees ' that

Fledge the wide-ridged mountains steep by steep ;

It was a pity that the previous dry weather had lessened the waters of Lodore. When Parson Newton visited them a month later the water was in full spate. He could hear the roar two miles off. He benefited by the rain which marred the holiday of our travellers.

In the evening they went on to see the Druid's circle which stands immeasurably old and grim on the top of a lone hill. Here in the narrative and the journal-letters we have two parallel descriptions it is interesting to compare. Brown's has a pedestrian quality. He describes the circle in detail, giving the position of the stones. This is Keats's :

We had a fag up hill, rather too near dinner-time, which was rendered void by the gratification of seeing those aged stones, on a gentle rise in the midst of Mountains, which at that time darkened all around, except at the fresh opening of the Vale of St. John.

In his 'aged stones,' shadowed by the mountains but for one long shaft of light, he conveys the sinister and lonely quality of the megaliths far more subtly and faithfully than Brown's guide-book description. Keats makes no comment on them but Brown, writing, it is only fair to say, for general reading, ends with 'Surrounded by a majestic panorama, the spot is suited to render the human mind awestruck, and possibly with the ignorant, superstitious.' Keats's gloss to this ancient poem of the human spirit can be found in *Hyperion* :

—dismal cirque  
Of Druid stones, upon a forlorn moor,  
When the chill rain begins at shut of eve,  
In dull November, and their chancel vault  
The Heaven itself, is blinded throughout night.

In the town of Keswick they saw the mountain scenery in a camera obscura. We do not know the effect of this minikin view on Keats but Brown remarks that the reduction of the vastness does away with much of its beauty and proves that mountain scenery cannot be put on canvas.

At the inn they were affronted by another whiff of the 'miasma of London' in the person of 'a yawning dandy' who came from his bedroom at midday 'and sat at his breakfast reading a bouncing novel.' Here Keats finished his letter to George and 'G minor'; but he finished it too late. When the letter reached Liverpool the young couple had sailed away.

The next day they ascended Skiddaw with two other men

and a guide at four o'clock in the morning. In Keats's own words :

It promised all along to be fair, and we had fagged and tugged nearly to the top, when, at half-past six there came a Mist upon us and shut out the view ; We did not, however, lose anything by it : we were high enough without mist, to see the coast of Scotland ; the Irish Sea ; the hills beyond Lancaster ; and nearly all the large ones of Cumberland and Westmoreland, particularly Helvellyn and Scawfell. It grew colder and colder as we ascended, and we were glad, at about three parts of the way, to taste a little rum which the Guide brought with him, mixed, mind ye with Mountain water, I took two glasses going and one returning. . . . So we have walked ten miles before Breakfast to-day. . . . All felt, on arising into the cold air, that same elevation which a cold bath gives one. I felt as if I were going to a Tournament.

Brown, a man of full habit and not a poet, found the climb fatiguing and somewhat disappointing. Half-way up he was so tired that it sounded to him like cruelty when the guide told them they had to go as far again. The panorama he considered only attractive in virtue of its strangeness. The mountains, he thought, ' became comparatively insignificant.' He hated the jolting, jarring jog-trot down. ' A man's inside seems mixing together like a Scotch haggis.'

Passing along Bassenthwaite they were astonished by the total change in scenery ; they saw highly cultivated fields and dales like those in Devon, only not so luxuriant. They left Cumberland and Westmorland behind them without regret as they intended to pass through them, following another route, on their way home. When they reached the inn at Ireby, ' a dull beggarly looking place,' they heard a thumping and thudding on the ceiling and were told that the lads and lassies were having their dancing lesson above. It was the custom there, as in Scotland, for every child who could afford it to learn to dance. Keats and Brown went upstairs and found ' fine, healthy, cleanly-dressed ' youngsters practising their steps with concentration. Brown wrote :

The instant the fiddle struck up, the slouch in the gait was lost, the feet moved, and gracefully, with complete conformity to the notes ; and they wove the figure, sometimes extremely complicated to my inexperienced eyes, without an error, or the slightest pause.

There was no sauntering half-asleep country dancer among them ;  
all were inspired, yet by

Nae cotillon brent-new frae France,  
But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys and reels,  
Put life and mettle in their heels.

This is the considered narrative of a practised journalist. Compare it with the sketch hastily dashed down by the man who perhaps saw, felt and heard more acutely than any man of his time :

. . . we were greatly amused by a country dancing-school holden at the Inn, it was indeed " no new cotillon fresh from France ". No, they kickit and jumpit with mettle extraordinary, and whiskit, and friskit, and toed it, and go'd it, and twirl'd it, and wheel'd it and stamped it, and sweated it, tattooing the floor like mad ; the difference between our country dances and these Scottish figures is about the same as leisurely stirring a cup o' Tea and beating up a batter-pudding.

Keats added :

I was extremely gratified to think, that if I had pleasures they knew nothing of, they had also some into which I could not possibly enter. I hope I shall not return without having got the Highland fling. There was as fine a row of boys and girls as you ever saw ; some beautiful faces and one exquisite mouth.

The hack writer generalises and the artist knows when to particularise.

The dancing children gave to Keats in his new mood more pleasure than the wonders of the scenery. ' I never,' he said, ' felt so near the glory of Patriotism, the glory of making by any means a country happier.'

He was anxious to reach Carlisle for there would be letters awaiting him. He found one from ' sister George—very delightful indeed ' which he kept for Tom to see. " ' Merry Carlisle ' " did not to our thinking,' wrote Brown, ' maintain its epithet ; the whole art of yawning might have been learned there.' They did not care for either cathedral or castle and the modern courthouses, Brown thought, were with their squab round towers adjoining the square Gothic buildings, ' like a tea-caddy and a low sugar dish placed side by side.'

Neither man was now in a mood for complete enjoyment



of what they saw. They had walked one hundred and fourteen miles in five days and were fatigued, though they would only admit to being a little tired in the thighs and to slightly blistered feet. They decided to cover the duller country between Carlisle and Dumfries by coach. Brown thought Gretna Green 'a sad ominous place for a young couple, poverty-struck and barren.'

At Dumfries they found themselves, to their amazement, in a foreign country: they had thought Scotch towns and Scottish folk would differ little from the English of the north. This was the first time that Brown, though Scottish by descent, had crossed the Border. Dumfries 'did not wear the air of comfort belonging to an English town.' They noticed the primitive cottages from which there was no outlet for smoke but by the door. The people they found 'more serious and inanimated than necessary.' Brown thought their speech 'tedious, slow and drawling,' but Keats was interested in the dialect and, with his quick ear, caught the characteristic rhythm. 'In Devonshire,' he noted, 'they say: "Well, where be ye going?" Here it is: "How is it all wi' yoursel?"' He has also in this acute piece of observation delineated one aspect of the Scottish character. The Scot may be more curious to know where his neighbour is going but he will not ask at once in the direct manner of the simpler Southren. They were particularly struck by the caution of the Scot. Keats told his brother:

The first well-dressed Scotchman we had any conversation with to our surprise, confessed himself a Deist. The careful manner of his delivering his opinions, not before he had received several encouraging hints from us, was very amusing.

They missed the grace of laughter. Brown said:

Except two or three girls who returned our "speerings," (alias usual salutations) on the road, with a sort of grin, we did not perceive an approach to a laugh. If laughter, as it is said, proves our distinction from other animals, the line does not seem to be correctly drawn between them and these northerns.

They arrived at Dumfries on July 1st, the day of the annual horse fair, so they saw many of these girls on the road, most of them carrying their shoes and stockings in their hands

ready to put on just before they entered the town. Keats was offended by 'their large splay feet.'

There was one thing in Scotland which at once met with their whole-hearted approval, the 'whuskey.' 'Very smart stuff it is . . . very pretty drink, and much praised by Burns.' This fiery potation of the north had not yet reached the Sassenach.

Their first visit in Dumfries was to the tomb of Burns. A man on the coach had pointed it out to them on the way 'with a deal of life: "There! de ye see it, amang the trees—white, wi' a roond tap." ' Brown's reaction to the monument was formal and didactic; he reflected on the need for well-kept memorials of 'great men in the intellectual world. . . . They may excite emulation, they must inspire reverence and gratitude, two feelings of which man is susceptible, to the improvement of his nature.' Keats did not find the memorial to his taste, 'though on a scale large enough to show they wanted to honour him.' His personal reaction was clouded by 'the feel of not to feel it.' Fatigue, the consciousness of the loss of one brother and the illness of the young one, numbed his spirit. We shall see later that he felt, too, the weight of the misery of Burns's life. He wrote this sonnet:

—On Visiting the Tomb of Burns—

The Town, the churchyard, and the setting sun,  
 The Clouds, the trees, the rounded hills all seem  
 Though beautiful, cold—strange—as in a dream,  
 I dreamed long ago, now new begun  
 The short-liv'd paly Summer is but won  
 From Winter's ague, for one hour's gleam;  
 Though sapphire-warm, their stars do never beam,  
 All is cold Beauty; pain is never done  
 For who has mind to relish Minos-wise,  
 The Real of Beauty, free from that dead hue  
 Sickly imagination and sick pride  
 Cast wan upon it! Burns! with honour due  
 I have off honour'd thee. Great shadow; hide  
 Thy face, I sin against thy native skies.

It is clear from lines eleven and twelve that as he stood by the grave of Burns his mind went out to that other dead poet whose tomb he had seen in September and in whose

thoughts he had lived so intensely for the last year. The lines grew out of a memory of Hamlet's utterance :

Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.

The reference to Minos, the impartial half-human judge of the underworld, was probably directly due to a recent reading of the 'Inferno': Cary's three volume pocket edition of his translation of the *Commedia* was the only book Keats carried with him. But the Minos of the 'Inferno' is a ghastly figure which in its horrid swish of the tail, to indicate to what circle of hell the unfortunate sinner shall descend, does not suggest a serene impartiality in effect. The reading of Canto V of the 'Inferno' must have sent his mind back to the classical story.

This desire to escape from a personal view of life, to have clear before him the final issue unfalsified by 'sickly imagination and sick pride,' was to grow stronger and stronger within him. He was as yet scarcely out of that dark wood where his soul was 'in a ferment,' when he wrote, feeling on his pulses the cruelty of the world :

Pleasure is oft a visitant ; but pain  
Clings cruelly to us, like the gnawing sloth  
Of the deer's tender haunches :

To Tom he wrote :

This Sonnet I have written in a strange mood, half-asleep. I know not how it is, the Clouds, the Sky, the Houses, all seem anti-Grecian and anti-Charlemagnish—

Of 'anti-Grecian and anti-Charlemagnish' there has been no satisfactory explanation. It has been suggested that he is saying that for him the flat, unfamiliar Scottish lowlands have neither the charm of warm, smiling southern beauty nor of the dreams of chivalry. This may have truth but surely it is not a complete explanation. We could only perhaps get at Keats's true meaning if we could evoke the shade of Tom who knew the private family language and who understood him best.

The rubbing of Keats's knapsack had split his coat and he

had to send it to a Dumfries tailor to be 'fortified at all points.' After visiting the ruins of Lincluden College they set out south-westward for Galloway, a country seldom visited by tourists at that time. They had intended to see Mrs. Burns while they were in Dumfries but we hear nothing of a visit to her. Their next halt was at Dalbeattie where they had been recommended to lodge with a Mr. Murray who kept a combined public-house and general shop. On arrival they found that a fast had been appointed in the parish for that day and Mr. Murray was from home. Mrs. Murray, perhaps taking them again for profitless customers who merely wanted a bed for the night, stood in the doorway humming and ha-ing, "dinna ken what to say!" However, the hungry travellers managed to persuade her and at length she admitted them.

They liked the look of the village which was clean, neat and snug. There were children about the street, 'clean and healthy-faced,' and dressed with especial care for the religious occasion. One chubby boy, unused to strangers, stared at them hard in some alarm. Rather tactlessly they called him a little fat pig and he immediately set up a howl. An 'auld wife' came darting out and rated them. She was 'nae pleased to see bairns made game of.' The unfailing balm to a small boy's wounded feelings was administered: his fingers closed over the silver sixpence 'with a true Scotch grasp,' said Brown, 'tight as the claw of a lobster.' He went off to a group of children who were sitting in a circle with their hands before them in perfect silence. Brown and Keats took this for a normal or abnormal quietness of behaviour and thought it was no wonder that they grew up into staid men and women. It is more probable that they were either 'playing fasts' or had been threatened into unnatural soberness to suit the solemn day. A 'sonsie lassie' put her head out of a cottage door. The men looked at her.

"There's a pretty girl!"

Out came her shoulders.

"A very pretty girl indeed!"

'She stretched her neck out, like a goose in a coop for more of barley.' But, no doubt, with the elders of the Kirk in mind, she 'maintained an unbecoming gravity.'

Mr. Murray proved to be a somewhat complacent gentleman who boasted that he had a better retail trade than any

shopkeeper in Dumfries and took as much as sixty-three pounds in a day. "This village," he said, "did not exist thirty years ago; at that time it was a bog, full of rocky stones. The gentleman who built it died the very day I had my leg cut off."

Perhaps this was his accustomed conversational gambit; of course, the eyes of his two guests immediately travelled downwards to his feet which looked perfectly normal. But Mr. Murray boasted, besides a thriving business, a fine artificial limb on which he walked as well as any man and 'was more active than most men with their two natural legs.'

The next morning they set out for Kirkcudbright, following Mr. Murray's directions, through fine country with wooded hills and craggy mountains to the right and 'a lovely landscape, wherein a lough of the sea appeared like a lake, to the left. A small bush-covered island near the shore added to the charm.' For the most part they walked through cornfields or skirted small forests. They were now in Scott country and Brown started talking about *Guy Mannering* which Keats had not read. Naturally Meg Merrilies figured largely in Brown's description of the book. Presently they came to 'a little spot . . . among fragments of rock, and brambles, and broom, and most tastefully ornamented with profusion of honeysuckle, wild-roses, and fox-glove, all in the very blush and fullness of blossom.'

Keats halted and cried:

"Without a shadow of doubt, on that spot, old Meg Merrilies has boiled her kettle!"

He said nothing more on the subject but when they reached the village of Auchencairn and were sitting at breakfast, both writing, Brown noticed that Keats's letter to his sister did not seem to be running in regular prose. Keats told him he was giving Fanny a ballad on Meg Merrilies. Brown asked if he might copy it but was told that it was only a trifle and wasn't worth the trouble. Neither Brown nor posterity have agreed with Keats's verdict: apart from its wistful beauty the ballad is perhaps Keats's most amazing extempore for he had not (so far as we know) ever handled the ballad measure before.

After seeing the ruined Abbey at Dundrennan they walked on towards Kirkcudbright. They had by this time become

more used to Scottish reserve and were liking the people better. Brown felt that the 'cold, solemn Dumfries is a befitting place wherein to write a libel on the Scotch.' They admired the neatness of clothing they saw, particularly in the women, and thought the English labouring classes compared unfavourably in that respect. They liked the civility of the peasants and found them intelligent. Brown was distressed by the women's bare feet but Keats could now admire the beauty of a girl's foot unspoiled in shape by freedom from shoes and particularly against the green of the grass.

At Kirkcudbright Keats continued his letter to Fanny, writing the doggerel rimes of which I have quoted the third verse in Chapter I. I give now the first and last verses :

There was a naughty Boy  
 A naughty boy was he  
 He would not stop at home  
 He could not quiet be—  
 He took  
 In his Knapsack  
 A Book  
 Full of vowels  
 And a shirt  
 With some towels—  
 A slight cap  
 For night cap—  
 A hair brush  
 Comb ditto  
 New Stockings  
 For old ones  
 Would split O !  
 This Knapsack  
 Tight at's back  
 He rivetted close  
 And followéd his Nose  
 To the North  
 To the North  
 And follow'd his nose  
 To the North.

There was a naughty Boy  
 And a naughty Boy was he  
 He ran away to Scotland  
 The people for to see—  
 There he found  
 That the ground  
 Was as hard  
 That a yard  
 Was as long,  
 That a song  
 Was as merry,  
 That a cherry  
 Was as red—  
 That lead  
 Was as weighty  
 That fourscore  
 Was as eighty  
 That a door  
 Was as wooden  
 As in england—  
 So he stood in  
 His shoes  
 And he wonderd  
 He wonderd  
 He stood in his  
 Shoes and he wonder'd.

The 'naughty boy' was probably an indirect reference to Mr. Abbey's disapproval. We know that he had termed Keats and Brown 'Don Quixotes.' There is no money to be made out of tilting at windmills; nothing to be gained by wearing out shoe-leather and staring at mountains.

Keats continued his letter :

My dear Fanny I am ashamed of writing you such stuff, nor would I if it were not for being tired after my day's walking, and ready to tumble into bed so fatigued that when I am asleep you might sew my nose to my great toe and trundle me round the town like a Hoop without waking me—Then I get so hungry—a Ham goes but a very little way and fowls are like Larks to me—A Batch of Bread I make no more ado with than a sheet of parliament ; and I can eat a Bull's head as easily as I used to do Bull's eyes—I take a whole string of Pork Sausages down as easily as a Pen'orth of Lady's fingers—

'Parliament' was a thin flat cake made of sticky gingerbread ;  
'Lady's fingers' a thin cake with sugar on it.

They were now heading towards Wigtown but went out of the direct road in order to walk by the sea. At Creetown they came upon a crowd of men, women and children ; so large a crowd that it looked like an emigration. On making enquiries they found that at high tide each day the whole population of the village went down to wash themselves on the shore, separating the sexes by a high jutting rock. This was a thing to be admired and wondered at in an era when cleanliness of person, although coming into fashion, was not yet a rule of life. The first Commoner of the land, the Duke ('Jockey') of Norfolk, never washed. His servants had to strip him and perform a very necessary ablution when he was dead drunk.

They rounded the top of Wigtown Bay and headed for Port Patrick in order to cross to Ireland to see the Giant's Causeway. The weather had turned very hot and six miles beyond Glenluce they were relieved to see the Irish Mail overtaking them. They coached the rest of the way, arriving at Port Patrick 'in a jiffy.' We do not know how long the crossing took them for we lack the detail of Brown's journal here ; he left out the Irish portion of the tour. It could take as long as four hours in rough weather but as the day was fine there was probably only a fair and serviceable breeze blowing. As they crossed they heard two old men singing ballads ; one about the Battle of the Boyne and the other about 'Robin Hood' with the refrain, 'Before the King you shall go, go, go, before the King you shall go.'

They had intended to spend a week in Ireland but found that living was three times as expensive as in Scotland and as costly as a fashionable London hotel. They had been told that it was only forty-eight miles to the Causeway but found them to be Irish miles ! So they contented themselves with a walk to Belfast, staying the night there and returning to Donaghadee and Port Patrick the next day. From Port Patrick Keats wrote to Tom :

The dialect on the neighbouring shores of Scotland and Ireland is much the same—yet I can perceive a great difference in the nations from the Chambermaid at this nate Inn kept by Mr. Kelly. She is fair, kind and ready to laugh, because she is out of the horrible dominion of the Scotch Kirk. A Scotch girl stands in terrible awe of the Elders—poor little Susannas—They will scarcely laugh—they are greatly to be pitied and the Kirk is greatly to be damn'd. These Kirkmen have done Scotland good (Query ?) they have made Men, Women, Old Men Young Men old Women young women, boys, girls and infants all careful—so that they are formed into regular Phalanges of savers and gainers—such a thrifty army cannot fail to enrich their Country and give it a greater appearance of comfort than that of their poor irish neighbours—These Kirkmen have done Scotland harm—they have banished puns and laughing and Kissing (except in cases where the very danger and crime must make it very fine and gustful). I shall make a full stop at Kissing for after that there should be a better paren/ thesis : and go on to remind you of the fate of Burns.

Poor unfortunate fellow—his disposition was Southern—how sad it is when a luxurious imagination is obliged in self defence to deaden its delicacy in vulgarity, and in things attainable that it may not have leisure to go mad after things which are not. No Man in such matters will be content with the experience of others—It is true that out of suffrance there is no greatness, no dignity ; that in the most abstracted Pleasure there is no lasting happiness : yet who would not like to discover over again that Cleopatra was a Gipsy, Helen a Rogue and Ruth a deep one ? I have not sufficient reasoning faculty to settle the doctrine of thrift—as it is consistent with the dignity of human Society—with the happiness of Cottagers—All I can do is by plump contrasts—Were the fingers made to squeeze a guinea or a white hand ?—Were the Lips made to hold a pen or a Kiss ? And yet in Cities Man is shut out from his fellows if he is poor, the Cottager must be dirty and very wretched if she be not thrifty—The present state of society demands this and this convinces me that the world is very young and in a



verry ignorant state—We live in a barbarous age. I would sooner be a wild deer than a Girl under the dominion of the Kirk, and I would sooner be a wild hog than be the occasion of a Poor Creatures pennance before those execrable elders.

His general impression of Ireland was not happy :

. . . we had too much opportunity to see the worse than nakedness, the rags, dirt and misery of the poor common Irish—A Scotch cottage, though in that sometimes the Smoke has no exit but at the door, is a pallace to an irish one. . . . We had the pleasure of finding our way through a Peat-Bog—three miles long at least—dreary, black, dank, flat and spongy : here and there were poor dirty creatures and a few strong men cutting or carting peat. We heard on passing into Belfast through a most wretched suburb that most disgusting of all noises . . . the sound of the Shuttle. What a tremendous difficulty is the improvement of the condition of such people. I cannot conceive how a mind ‘with child’ of Philanthropy could grasp at possibility—with me it is absolute despair.

At a miserable house of entertainment half way between Donaghadee and Belfast were two Men Sitting at Whiskey—one a Laborer and the other I took to be a drunken Weaver—The Laborer took me for a Frenchman and the other hinted at Bounty Money saying he was ready to take it. On calling for the Letters at Port patrick the man snapp’d out ‘what Regiment’?

. . . The two Irishmen I mentioned were speaking of their treatment in England when the Weaver said—‘Ah you were a civil Man but I was a drinker.’

In this letter occurs the celebrated description of the Duchess of Dunghill :

On our return from Belfast we met a Sadan—the Duchess of Dunghill—It is no laughing matter tho—Imagine the worst dog kennel you ever saw placed upon two poles from a mouldy fencing. In such a wretched thing sat a squalid old Woman squat like an ape half starved from a scarcity of Biscuit in its passage from Madagascar to the cape,—with a pipe in her mouth and looking out with a round-eyed skinny lidded inanity—with a sort of horizontal idiotic movement of her head—squab and lean she sat and puff’d out the smoke while two ragged tattered Girls carried her along. What a thing would be a history of her Life and sensations.

From Fort Patrick they walked northwards to Stranraer at the bottom of Loch Ryan and thence into Ayrshire. Here

they enjoyed the beauties of rich glens, mountain and stream and the grey ocean hurling himself against the rocky shore and filling the sounding caverns. The coast, the wooded glens were lovely enough but now they were to enter the vale of Glen App. 'The entrance to it was like an enchanted region.' They were back among the mountains they loved. With the mountains came the rain but not enough to damp their enthusiasm or to obscure the atmosphere. They began to climb up and up, filling their lungs with the exhilarating air. I will give this part of the walk and its climax of joy in Keats's own words. It is a pleasure to follow the movement of his prose and to note how the arrangement of words and of vowel-sounds convey with the utmost economy of language, not only the changing scenery itself, but the effect of walking among it.

When we left Cairn our Road lay half way up the sides of a green mountainous shore, full of Clefs of verdure and eternally varying—sometimes up sometimes down, and over little Bridges going across green chasms of moss rock and trees—winding about every where. After two or three Miles of this we turned suddenly into a magnificent glen finely wooded in Parts—seven Miles long—with a Mountain Stream winding down the Midst—full of cottages in the most happy Situations—the sides of the Hills covered with sheep—the effect of cattle lowing I never had so finely. At the end we had a gradual ascent and got among the tops of the Mountains whence In a little time I descried in the Sea Ailsa Rock 940 feet high—it was 15 Miles distant and seemed close upon us—the effect of ailsa with the peculiar perspective of the Sea in connection with the ground we stood on, and the misty rain then falling gave me a complete Idea of a deluge. Ailsa struck me very suddenly—really I was a little alarmed.

The last two sentences run on breathlessly: he was reliving the sudden shock, the intaken breath when he saw for the first time the great bird-haunted rock, the giant's stepping-stone from Arran to the mainland.

The rain now beginning to fall in good earnest, they hurried down to Ballantrae. There they met with their first dirty inn in Scotland. The Post-chaise was the best inn but they had been warned not to go there as the landlord was 'a little in trouble.' This they found to be a typically Scotch understatement; the landlord of the Post-chaise had just been

arrested for robbing the Paisley Bank! As they came into the town they met with a lassie who took them for travelling jewellers and shewed great eagerness to see their shining wares.

They met an old man who talked well and animatedly, so they asked him if he had ever seen Burns or what he knew of him.

"I ha ne-er seen that Burns," he answered, "but I perfectly approve o' him; for he may ha' had, and so in fac' I think, some guid sense; an' what I nae much ken o', he had a clever knack o' rhyming."

Retired for the night in their bad lodging they were kept awake by tearing, howling winds that shook and shuddered at the windows and doors and lashed the raging sea. Did Keats as he tossed and turned in his dirty uncomfortable bed meditate the sonnet to the great rock standing out there, firm in the bed of the roaring ocean, 'in the Lap of Thunder'? He wrote the sonnet at Girvan where the Craig was only ten miles from the land, but I give the sonnet here, because I feel in it the voice of the storm.

#### To Ailsa Rock

Hearken thou craggy ocean pyramid,	7.
Give answer by thy voice the Sea fowls screams!	"
When were thy shoulders mantled in huge Streams?	"
When from the Sun was thy broad forehead hid?	a
How long ist since the mighty Power bid	a
Thee heave to airy sleep from fathom dreams—	b
Sleep in the Lap of Thunder or Sunbeams,	b
Or when grey clouds are thy cold Coverlid—	c
Thou answerst not for thou art dead asleep	c
Thy Life is but two dead eternities	d
The last in Air, the former in the deep—	"
First with the Whales, last with the eagle skies—	"
Drown'd wast thou till an Earthquake made thee steep—	"
Another cannot wake thy giant Size!	e

Keats considered this the only sonnet of any worth he had written of late. At Ballantrae he wrote at Brown's request 'a Galloway Song' in dialect to palm off upon the antiquarian Dilke as a genuine article, but decided that it was not good enough. It is a lover's lament over the marriage of his lady to another and was suggested by meeting a wedding-party as they entered the town.

Here Brown's published account ends unfortunately: his more pedestrian narrative adds valuable detail to Keats's own story in the letters.

Keats was agreeably surprised at the fertility of Burns's country: he had imagined Ayrshire as 'more desolate, his (Burns's) rigs of Barley seemed always to me but a few strips of Green on a cold hill—O prejudice! it was as rich as Devon.' The civilised beauty of the fertile countryside is thrown into relief by the mountains of Arran, 'black and huge across the sea,' to which the Craig stands a lone sentinel. They were now going up towards Ayr, passing through Girvan, Kirkoswald, where Burns went to school, and Maybole. Keats had promised his brother a comparison between the Scotch and Irish and he sent it to him from Kirkoswald. Although interesting, the comparison is, in the nature of things, but superficial. The most outstanding passage in it is perhaps this: 'The Scotchman has made up his Mind within himself in a Sort of snail shell wisdom—the Irishman is full of strong headed instinct—The Scotchman is farther in Humanity than the Irishman—there he will stick perhaps when the Irishman shall be refined beyond him—'

As they came nearer to Ayr, Burns was much in their minds and they made enquiries about him on the way. 'We came down,' Keats wrote to Reynolds, 'upon everything suddenly——'

there were in our way the "bonny Doon", with the Brig that Tam O'Shanter crossed—Kirk Alloway, Burns's Cottage and then the Brigs of Ayr—First we stood upon the Bridge across the Doon; surrounded by every Phantasy of Green in tree, Meadow and Hill, —the Stream of the Doon, as a Farmer told us, is covered with trees from head to foot—you know those beautiful heaths so fresh against the weather of a summers evening—there was one stretching along behind the trees.

They went down to Burns's Cottage, then a whiskey-shop, and took some Whiskey—I wrote a sonnet for the mere sake of writing some lines under the Roof—they are so bad I cannot transcribe them—the Man at the Cottage was a great Bore with his Anecdotes—I hate the Rascal—his Life consists in fuz, fuzzy, fuzziest—He drinks glasses five for the Quarter and twelve for the hour,—he is a mahogany faced old Jackass who knew Burns—He

ought to have been kicked for having spoken to him. He calls himself "a curious old Bitch"—but he is flat old Dog—I sho<sup>d</sup> like to employ Caliph Vathek to kick him—O the flummery of a birth place! Cant! Cant! Cant! It is enough to give a spirit the guts-ache—Many a true word they say is spoken in jest—this may be because his Gab hindered my sublimity—The flat dog made me write a flat sonnet.

Keats destroyed his sonnet, but not before the careful Brown had taken a copy. Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote to H. Buxton Forman, 'for all Keats says about it himself, it is a fine thing.'

Of Burns, Keats wrote to Reynolds :

His Misery is a dead weight upon the nimbleness of one's quill—I tried to forget it—to drink Toddy without any Care—to write a merry Sonnet—it wont do—he talked with Bitches—he drank with blackguards, he was miserable—We can see horribly clear in the works of such a Man his whole Life, as if we were God's spies.

On their way to Ayr they dined with a traveller whose notions of Shakespeare were a trifle mixed. Talking of Kean, He said he had seen him at Glasgow 'in Othello in the Jew, I mean, er, er, er, the Jew in Shylock' He got bother'd completely in vague ideas of the Jew in Othello, Shylock in the Jew, Shylock in Othello, Othello in Shylock, the Jew in Othello &c &c &c he left himself in a mess at last—Still satisfied with himself he went to the Window and gave an abortive whistle of some tune or other—it might have been Handel.

From Ayr they went to Glasgow where they admired the Cathedral and the fine stone buildings :

We enterd Glasgow last Evening under the most oppressive Stare a body could feel—When we had crossed the Bridge Brown look'd back and said its whole population had turned to wonder at us—we came on till a drunken Man came up to me—I put him off with my Arm—he returned all up in Arms saying aloud that, 'he had seen all foreigners bu-u-ut he never saw the like o' me—I was obliged to mention the word Officer and Police before he would desist—

The population of Glasgow had some cause for astonishment if Brown was then wearing the costume he described later in a letter to Dilke from Inverness. He called himself 'an odd figure.' He wore a tartan coat and trousers, a plaid thrown

over his shoulders and a white hat. He carried, beside his knapsack on his back, a stout stick in his hand. His spectacles were always an object of interest. Keats called him the Red Cross Knight and declared his own shadow was ready to split its sides as it followed him. He himself was content to confine an oddity of attire to a fur cap.

When they came to Loch Lomond they were again offended by the 'miasma' of tourists. 'Steam Boats on Loch Lomond,' said Keats, 'and Barouches on its sides take a little from the Pleasure of such romantic chaps as Brown and I.'

The lower end of the loch where it narrows into the Leven caught his imagination. He gave Tom a neat pen-and-ink sketch of it, adding colour notes. He said :

the Evening was beautiful nothing could surpass our fortune in the weather—yet was I worldly enough to wish for a fleet of chivalry Barges with Trumpets and Banners just to die away before me into that blue place among the mountains—

Perhaps Keats had at the back of his mind the 'four mann'd and masted barges' of canto 1, section 16 of 'The Lady of the Lake' although he has reversed the barges and substituted trumpets for bagpipes. It was the fashion in Keats's circle to speak of Scott as a popular versifier but no one who had been a boy at the beginning of the century could escape his influence, especially on his native soil. We find above in the same letter a fragment of a rough story made up by Brown on the names of the places with which they had come in contact, beginning '*The Lady of the Lake* went to Rock herself to sleep on Arthur's seat and the *Lord of the Isles* etc.'

They now walked through 'tremendous glens' towards Loch Fyne and had gone fifteen miles before breakfast making for a place called Rest and be Thankful, only to find it was not an inn but a stone seat. They had to carry their empty stomachs on weary feet for another five miles. As they passed, in the early morning, through Glencro, they were 'pleased with the noise of Shepherds Sheep and dogs in the misty heights' above. For some time they could only hear them but at length 'two came in sight creeping among the Craggs like Emmets.'

Keats was glad, when they came to the banks of Loch Fyne, a lough of the sea, to bathe the dust off himself in the

salt water. He came out 'quite pat and fresh except for the cursed Gad flies—damn 'em they have been at me ever since I left the Swan and two necks.' He made up for Tom a set of doggrel rimes, joyous and Georgian in tone, on the possible usages of gadflies and their stings, of which this is a fair sample :

Is there a Man in Parliament  
Dum founder'd in his speech  
O let his neighbour make a rent  
And put one in his breech.

They rounded the top of Loch Fyne to Inverary, that fine old town on the edge of the water. The county families of Argyll spent their winters in Inverary and there were many large houses, dominated by the Duke's castle. Keats found the castle 'very modern but magnificent.' Its setting was beautiful among woods 'old enough to remember two or three changes in the Craggs above them.' He enjoyed a band, almost certainly the Duke's own band of brass and drums, playing by the Castle. But soon a piper struck up and it was too much for his Sassenach ears. 'I thought the beast would never have done.'

Brown's feet were painful through walking in new shoes and he was glad to rest that evening. Keats went alone to a performance by barnstormers of that once popular drama from the German, *The Stranger*. He found both play and performance intolerable and at times a positive torture; the bagpipes were employed to heighten dramatic tension. 'At the heart-rending shoemending reconciliation the Piper blew amain.' The adjective 'shoemending' is a just one for the last scene of this play. Indeed, the whole of *The Stranger* is wretched cobbler's work.

The next morning it rained and thundered but they did not mind. The state of Brown's feet demanded a rest in any case. When they were again able to set off they went across to Loch Awe, walked twenty miles down its banks and on to Kilmelfort on the coast, opposite Luig Island.

. . . the near Hills were not very lofty but many of their steeply beautifully wooded—the distant Mountains in the Hebrides very grand the Saltwater Lakes coming up between Craggs and Islands fulltided and scarcely ruffled—sometimes appearing as one large Lake, sometimes as three distinct ones in different directions—At

one point we saw afar off a rocky opening into the main Sea—We have also seen an Eagle or two. They move about without the least motion of Wings when in an indolent fit—

They were now in Gaelic-speaking country though many of the people could speak English. Their enjoyment was a little marred by the state of Brown's feet and by the food which in these unfrequented regions was lamentably poor. They had found it difficult at times to get good provender in Wigtown and Galloway but here a poor diet was the rule. Eggs and oat cake revolted them; there was no white bread to be had. One day they rejoiced in a small chicken and a bottle of port, but that was a happy exception. Fortunately they could take a gill of whisky with their meals; this must have helped to digest the sickening quantity of eggs and 'the cursed oatcake.' When Keats did encounter a bit of white bread he fell upon it 'like a sparrow.'

They saw to their surprise very few kilts but, said Keats: 'At Fort William they say a Man is not admitted into Society without one—the Ladies there have a horror at the indecency of Breeches.' The inn at Kilmelfort they found comfortable and well furnished. The old grandmother of the house, 'intelligent though not over clean,' made them some snuff as there was none to be had in the village. They were kept awake at night by 'some Whiskey Men' who 'sat up clattering Gaelic' into the morning. They were again affronted here by the poverty of 'the wretched black Cottages scented of peat smoke which finds its way out by a door or by a hole in the roof.'

While they were walking the Highland country Keats had not forgotten Burns. He was composing with considerable pains those lines in polter's measure, 'There is a joy in footing slow across a silent plain' and he probably wrote them down about this time. In them are thoughts of Burns and of his beloved brothers and sister. There is a sober sadness in the lines.

They walked fifteen miles north in heavy rain to Oban, the port for the Hebrides. They wanted to cross to Staffa but found it an expensive place to visit. They were asked seven guineas 'and those rather extorted . . . like paying sixpence for an apple at the playhouse.' However, they managed to make a bargain for crossing to Mull, a walk across the



island and a visit to Iona, the isle of ancient sanctity on its opposite shore. In those wild, Gaelic-speaking regions it was necessary to take a guide. They took ferry to Kerrara and again to Mull. On Kerrara they saw, looming high on a gaunt rock, the ruins of Gylen Castle whose casements opened in days gone by on 'foam of perilous seas.'

On Mull they had a disagreeable walk of thirty-seven miles over 'bog and rock and river' with, said Keats, 'our Breeches tucked up and our Stockings in hand.' They spent the night in their clothes in a small smoky shepherd's hut with an earthen floor 'full of Hills and Dales.' Their attitude to the scenery on Mull is interesting. The traveller of the earlier part of the eighteenth century was apt to dismiss the mountains of Scotland as barbarous. In steep and dangerous passes, with the fear of robbers ever before him, he had little temptation or opportunity to admire the view. In times of safer travel Keats and Brown could enjoy to the full the glories of the hills; although Brown, accepting the 'gothic' beauties of a Salvator Rosa landscape as 'romantic,' demanded a clothing of trees. In this noisy, man-ridden age the lover of lone beauty, faced with a notorious 'beauty-spot' contaminated by the fumes of petrol and litter-strewing cockneys on holiday, yearns for wide bird-haunted open spaces, for the bare beauty of moor, bog and fen under changing skies. But our two romantics found the bareness of the Hebrides ugly. The element of discomfort again had its effect; there might be no danger to life and limb but there were then no pleasant dry roads across the island. And unfortunately Keats caught a bad cold in Mull.

Brown, who had been enquiring about his ancestors in the Highlands, now came closer to his own kin. He thought his grandfather had been born on Luing Island, off the opposing main land, and here he 'chatted with ane who had been a Miss Brown and who I think,' said Keats, 'from a likeness must have been a Relation':

—he jawed with the old Woman—flattered a young one—kissed a child who was affraid of his Spectacles and finally drank a pint of Milk—They handle his Spectacles as we do a sensitive leaf—

They found the people kind. Once when they lost their way and inquired at a cottage, a young woman 'without a word

threw on her cloak and walked a Mile in a missling rain and splashy way to put us right again.' They liked their guide who was friendly and helpful and sang them Gaelic songs.

They crossed the mile of sea to Iona. They saw the burial places of ancient kings and chieftains, collected or bought some Scotch pebbles for Fanny and then hired a boat 'at a bargain' for Staffa. Keats's impressions of Staffa must be given in his own words :

—One may compare the surface of the Island to a roof—this roof is supported by grand pillars of basalt standing together as thick as honeycombs. The finest thing is Fingal's Cave—it is entirely a hollowing out of Basalt Pillars. Suppose now the Giants who rebelled against Jove had taken a whole Mass of black Columns and bound them together like bunches of matches—and then with immense Axes had made a cavern in the body of these columns—of course the roof and floor must be composed of the broken ends of the Columns—such is Fingal's Cave except that the Sea has done the work of excavations and is continually dashing there—so that we walk along the sides of the cave on the pillars which are left as if for convenient Stairs—the roof is arched somewhat gothic wise and the length of some of the entire side pillars is 50 feet—About the island you might seat an army of Men each on a pillar. The length of the Cave is 120 feet and from its extremity the view into the sea through the large Arch at the entrance is very grand—the colour of the columns is a sort of black with a lurking gloom of purple therein—For solemnity and grandeur it far surpasses the finest Cathedrall—At the extremity of the Cave there is a small perforation into another cave, at which the waters meeting and buffetting each other there is sometimes produced a report as of a cannon heard as far as Iona which must be 12 Miles—As we approached in the boat there was such a fine swell of the sea that the pillars appeared rising immediately out of the crystal—But it is impossible to describe it.

He composed here the poem beginning :

Not Aladin magian  
Ever such a work began.

which is almost an apocalypse, in which he conjured up the spirit of Lycidas whose body, Milton had supposed, might have been hurled 'beyond the stormy Hebrides.' The memory of Fingal's Cave went in its epic grandeur into 'Hyperion.'

On their way back to Oban they had a vivid sight of

'nature red in tooth and claw,' of that cruel aspect of life which had been puzzling and hurting Keats for months past. They saw a swarm of seagulls attacking a shoal of herrings 'with now and then a porpoise heaving about among them for a supper.' So great was the destruction of the fish that the water was 'literally spangled with herring scales.'

A sore throat, the fatal harbinger of disease and suffering, was already troubling Keats and they rested at Oban for a day or two. The bad weather did not improve his condition. When his throat felt easier they set off north and at Letterfinlay, about twelve miles from Ben Nevis, Keats wrote his brother a fine letter headed,

Ah mio Ben.

They had made the ascent of Ben Nevis and as it is the highest mountain in Great Britain, Keats made up his mind never to climb another 'in the empire.'

I am heartily glad it is done—it is almost like a fly crawling up a wainscoat—Imagine the task of mounting 10 Saint Pauls without the convenience of Stair cases.

They started at five in the morning with a guide 'in the Tartan and Cap' and 'after much fag and tug and a rest and a glass of whiskey' they attained to the first rise. After some level walking in a 'heath valley in which there was a Loch' they mounted to the last three miles 'of a stony ascent' where they went among the loose stones,

large and small sometimes on two sometimes on three, sometimes four legs—sometimes two and stick, sometimes three and stick, then four again, then two, then a jump, so that we kept ringing changes on foot, hand, stick, jump, boggle, stumble, foot, hand, foot, (very gingerly) stick again, and then again a game at all fours.

They must have envied the four legs of the dog which accompanied them, keeping all the time a sharp look-out for the red deer on Nevis; but neither he nor his human friends saw one.

Half-way up they passed large patches of snow and nearer the summit came into a thick mist. The chasms in the mountain, many of them snow-filled, Keats thought 'the finest wonder of the whole :

These Chasms are 1500 feet in depth and are the most tremendous places I have ever seen—they turn one giddy if you choose to give way to it—We tumbled in large stones and set the echoes at work in fine style. Sometimes these chasms are tolerably clear, sometimes there is a misty cloud which seems to steam up and sometimes they are entirely smothered with clouds.

After a while the mist cleared away only to reveal, not clear distances, but

large Clouds about attracted by old Ben to a certain distance so as to form as it appear'd large dome curtains which kept sailing about, opening and shutting at intervals here and there and everywhere ; so that although we did not see one vast wide extent of prospect all round we saw something perhaps finer—these cloud-veils opening with a dissolving motion and showing us the mountainous region beneath as through a loop hole—these cloudy loop holes ever varying and discovering fresh prospect east, west north and South. Then it was misty again and again it was fair—then puff came a cold breeze of wind and bared a craggy chap we had not yet seen though in close neighbourhood—Every now and then we had over head blue Sky clear and the sun pretty warm. . . . There is not a more fickle thing than the top of a Mountain—what would a Lady give to change her headdress as often and with as little trouble !

On the summit Keats stood triumphantly on a pile of stones 'and so got a little higher than old Ben himself.' He was tired, but not too weary to commemorate the ascent by a fine sonnet :

Read me a Lesson, muse, and speak it loud  
 Upon the top of Nevis blind in Mist !  
 I look into the Chasms and a Shroud  
 Vaprous doth hide them ; just so much I wist  
 Mankind do know of Hell : I look o'erhead  
 And there is sullen mist ; even so much  
 Mankind can tell of Heaven : Mist is spread  
 Before the Earth beneath me—even such  
 Even so vague is Man's sight of himself.  
 Here are the craggy Stones beneath my feet ;  
 Thus much I know, that a poor witless elf  
 I tread on them ; that all my eye doth meet  
 Is mist and Crag—not only on this height,  
 But in the world of thought and mental might—

The descent was 'vile.' Keats 'felt it horribly.'

They had been entertained by the story of a certain Mrs. Cameron, a woman of fifty and 'the fattest woman in all Inverness shire' who had got up the mountain with the aid of her servants. Keats said: 'She ought to have hired Sisyphus.' He wrote some delightful verses on her (unfortunately too long to quote) for his brother's entertainment. They are in the form of a spirited dialogue between her and the mountain.

About this time he received a letter from a friend enclosing an invitation from Blackwood, who must have been informed of the original intention of the walkers to return through Edinburgh. The friend (probably Bailey, whom Keats had intended to visit at Carlisle as he went south) urged Keats to accept and to try to conciliate the owner of the powerful Tory organ. It is possible that if Keats had complied the virulent attack on him in *Blackwood's Magazine* might have been avoided. The pundits of the north were not unwilling to be placated. Haydon thought it worth while, in the winter of 1820 when his picture was to be exhibited in Scotland, to visit 'the very camp of the enemy, where Blackwood reigned' and to make himself agreeable to Lockhart and Wilson, the twin personalities of 'Z.' Keats, however, as one would expect, rejected his friend's proposal with indignation and scorn.

At Inverness, Keats wrote a letter to Georgiana's mother:

It was a great regret to me that I should leave all my friends, just at the moment when I might have helped to soften away the time for them. I wanted not to leave my brother Tom, but more especially, believe me, I should like to have remained near you, were it but for an atom of consolation after parting with so dear a daughter; My brother George has ever been more than a brother to me, he has been my greatest friend, and I can never forget the sacrifice you have made for his happiness. As I walk along the Mountains here I am full of these things, and lay in wait, as it were, for the pleasure of seeing you, immediately on my return to town. I wish above all things, to say a word of Comfort to you, but I know not how. It is impossible to prove that black is white. It is impossible to make out, that sorrow is joy, or joy is sorrow—

He then referred to a tale Tom had written him of Mrs. Wylie calling in some alarm on Haslam. She had read in the paper

of a man in a fur cap falling over a precipice in Kirkcudbrightshire :

If it was me, I did it in a dream, or in some magic interval between the first and second cup of tea ; which is nothing extraordinary, when we hear that Mahomet, in getting out of Bed, upset a jug of water, and whilst it was falling, took a fortnight's trip as it seemed, to Heaven ; yet was back in time to save one drop of water being spilt.

He said he had only seen one other fur cap and that was at Carlisle which

I dare say was the unfortunate one. I dare say that the Fates seeing but two Fur caps in the North, thought it too extraordinary, and so threw the Dies which of them should be drowned. The lot fell upon Jonas. I dare say his name was Jonas. . . . Stop ! let me see !—being half-drowned by falling from a precipice is a very romantic affair—why should I not take it to myself ? Keep my secret & I will. How glorious to be introduced in a drawing-room to a Lady who reads Novels, with “ Mr So-and-so—Miss So-and-so ; Miss So-and-so, this is Mr So-and-so who fell off a precipice and was half-drowned.”

Such a reputation would make his fortune !

His throat was now so much worse that he had to consult a doctor. He was ‘ thin and fevered ’ and far too unwell to continue the journey. He decided to go home by sea from Cromarty. While he awaited a ship he visited Beaulieu Abbey with Brown. They afterwards made together a set of verses of little worth on a heap of skulls lying there which they took to be those of the old monks. The smack took nine days to reach London Bridge. Keats landed there on August 18th.

Brown continued his tour alone. He must have been an exceptionally strong man. Six weeks of average walking of twenty miles a day through difficult country in bad weather, latterly on a poor diet, does not seem to have lowered his physique. He and Keats had been, in his own words, ‘ always moving—moving from one place to another, like Dante’s inhabitants of the Sulphur Kingdom in search of cold ground.’ Every night when he arrived at an inn he was still fresh enough to write ‘ volumes of adventure to Dilke.’ Keats commented on this nightly industry to Bailey :

When we get in of an evening and I have perhaps taken my rest on a couple of Chairs he affronts my indolence and Luxury by pulling out of his Knapsack 1<sup>st</sup> his paper—2<sup>ndly</sup> his pens and last his ink . . . I say now why not Bailey take out his pens first sometimes—But I might as well tell a hen to hold up her head before she drinks instead of afterwards.

Keats was, fortunately, not sea-sick on the voyage though he had ‘a little Qualm now and then.’ He was forced to feed on beef all the way ‘not being able to eat the thick Porridge which the Ladies managed to manage with large awkward horn spoons into the bargain.’ He was the only Englishman on board. The journey was not made more pleasant by a dawning toothache.

His tour would have been cut short in any case, for Tom was much worse and the doctor had said his brother must be advised. Fortunately Dilke’s letter had not reached Keats before he left Cromarty so he was spared anxiety on the voyage.

Mrs. Dilke tells us that he came back as brown as a berry and ‘with scarcely any shoes left, his jacket all torn at the back, a fur cap, a great plaid and his knapsack.’ A sore throat, the toothache and the shock of Tom’s condition might well have made him gloomy but Keats was never a man to worry his friends with his troubles. He was outwardly cheerful. He sat down in a comfortable stuffed chair and wriggled himself in with enjoyment, saying with a grin :

“ ‘Bless thee, Bottom ! bless thee ! thou art translated.’ ”

## CHAPTER XV

### *The Death of Tom (August-December, 1818)*

KEATS'S FIRST THOUGHT AFTER HE HAD RECOVERED FROM the first shock of his brother's relapse was to write to his little sister. He made the best of Tom's condition but added : 'I shall ask Mr. Abbey to let me bring you to Hampstead.' In his letter there is a charming glimpse of one of Fanny's youthful ambitions, 'I would not advise you to play on the Flageolet however I will get you one if you please.'

Fanny was now fifteen. She had asked her brother to speak to her guardian about her school and he had promised to do so. Mr. Abbey wanted to take her away, considering perhaps that she had now as much education as was good for a girl. But she was happier at Miss Caley's. There she must have been fairly free to indulge her own fancies since she talked of playing on the flageolet : apparently the letters she received were not censored by her headmistress, for those from her brother were often decidedly outspoken with regard to her guardian and his wife. She asked her brother to try to persuade Abbey to allow her to remain at school.

Fanny was brought up to see poor Tom who was so pleased that he found it hard to let her go. But he became so agitated on her departure that Keats was doubtful whether a further visit would be wise. Mr. Abbey, too, had a decided doubt but not from any consideration for Tom : he had found out from Fanny that she had been taken to see some friends of her brothers. When Keats called on him to arrange a day for Fanny to come up to Hampstead again he would not give his consent. Keats had to write Fanny a difficult letter explaining why he had not been able to arrange for her to come up and hinting that it would have been wiser not to mention the visits. It would seem unwise to tell a child not to be open with



her guardian and he felt the embarrassment. This is how he put it :

I do not mean to say you did wrongly in speaking of it, for there should rightly be no objection to such things : but you know with what People we are obliged in the course of Childhood to associate ; whose conduct forces us into duplicity and falsehood to them. To the worst of People we should be openhearted : but it is as well as things are to be prudent in making any communication to any one, that may throw an impediment in the way of any of the little pleasures you may have. I do not recommend duplicity but prudence with such people. Perhaps I am talking too deeply for you : if you do not now, you will understand what I mean in the course of a few years.

Determined not to submit to such tyranny Keats again called on Mr. Abbey. He obtained the concession of one more visit ' between this (November 5th) and the Holy-days.' Mr. Abbey could not at that period have been actuated by any fear of the child contracting the disease from her brother : we can only, therefore, set his conduct down to callousness ; he must have known how desperately ill his other ward was. However, Keats by dint of persistence extracted permission for a few more visits. We hear nothing of any active interest taken in Tom by Abbey although he was still legally under his guardianship. Keats was unlikely, in the circumstances, to be able to persuade Abbey to allow Fanny to remain at school .

Keats had by now read the cruel Tory reviews of *Endymion*. He was naturally enough hurt and discouraged, but he soon recovered his poetic balance. Soon after his return he had dined at Taylor's in company with Woodhouse and in the first bitterness engendered by *Blackwood's* attacks he had declared he would write no more ; anyhow, it was not worth while for there was now nothing original that could be said in poetry. Woodhouse, not realising that the artist lives more completely in his mood than most men, had taken this declaration as a final decision, and when the *Quarterly* review came out he wrote a long, kindly, thoughtful letter encouraging Keats by argument and praise to know his own worth and ' reverence the lyre.' Keats must have grinned somewhat shamefacedly over this letter for he was already at work on 'Hyperion.' He thanked Woodhouse for his friendly solicitude and tried to explain himself thus :

1<sup>st</sup>. As to the poetical Character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself—it has no self—it is every thing and nothing—It has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated—It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation. A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity— . . . filling some other Body—The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute—the poet has none; no identity—he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures. If then he has no self, and if I am a Poet, where is the Wonder that I should say I would write no more? Might I not at that very instant have been cogitating on the Characters of Saturn and Ops? It is a wretched thing to confess; but is a very fact that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical nature—how can it, when I have no nature? When I am in a room with People if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself: but the identity of every one in the room begins so to press upon me that I am in a very little time annihilated—not only among Men; it would be the same in a Nursery of children: I know not whether I make myself wholly understood: I hope enough so to let you see that no dependence is to be placed on what I said that day.

This possession of Keats by the personalities of others appears to me to be more strongly the attribute of Keats as born dramatist than as pure poet. He went on in his letter to Woodhouse to speak of his purpose in life:

I am ambitious of doing the world some good: if I should be spared that may be the work of maturer years—in the interval I will assay to reach to as high a summit in Poetry as the nerve bestowed upon me will suffer. The faint conceptions I have of Poems to come brings the blood frequently into my forehead. All I hope is that I may not lose all interest in human affairs—that the solitary indifference I feel for applause even from the finest Spirits, will not blunt any acuteness of vision I may have. I do not think it will—I feel assured I should write from the mere

yearning and fondness I have for the Beautiful even if my night's labours should be burnt every morning, and no eye ever shine upon them.

He ended by saying that perhaps even now he was not speaking from himself, but in an assumed character : but the next sentence he could assure Woodhouse was from himself :

I feel your anxiety, good opinion and friendliness in the highest degree, and am,

Your's most sincerely

John Keats.

Keats was a man of common-sense and would see that a good deal of the abuse of the Tory journals he had brought upon himself by his open partisanship of Leigh Hunt and of the liberal cause. As Haydon very sensibly remarked, war is war, and if you enter into it you must abide the consequences. After all, *The Examiner* had been, and continued to be, highly provocative. Hazlitt was at this time similarly attacked in *Blackwood's*, and, although he himself had made many personal attacks on others, was furiously angry and threatened prosecution. Hazlitt was a man whose touchiness amounted to mania so that he often fancied an insult where none was intended. If a friend inadvertently passed him in the street he would construe it into an insult. It was not, therefore, likely that he would take a gross attack from *Blackwood's* with calm. In Keats, on the other hand, pride and the dignity of his high vocation precluded retaliation. The old belligerent spirit was conquered : his friends speak of him as gentle and ever ready to make excuses for others. The praise of friends and the protests in the public Press against the virulence of the Tory attacks gave him pleasure, but did not alter his own opinion of 'the slipshod Endymion' :

Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic on his own Works. My own domestic criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what *Blackwood* or the *Quarterly* could possibly inflict, and also when I feel I am right, no external praise can give me such a glow as my own solitary re-perception & ratification of what is fine.

. . . I have written independently without *Judgment*.—I may write independently & *with Judgment* hereafter. The Genius of

Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man: It cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation & watchfulness in itself. That which is creative must create itself—In Endymion I leaped headlong into the Sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the Soundings, the quicksands, & the rocks, than if I had stayed upon the green shore, and piped a silly pipe, and took tea & comfortable advice.—I was never afraid of failure; for I would sooner fail than not be among the greatest.

That penalty which he had to pay for his finely attuned nature in suffering with those he loved was now so heavy that he was sometimes obliged to go out, although he had meant to spend the necessarily long hours beside the sick-bed in study. He could not, even in that other world of reality, his Shakespeare, escape a consciousness of the dying boy, dying 'with an exquisite love of life.' On October 4th, a Sunday evening, he was reading *King Lear*. In Act III he underlined the words 'poore Tom,' putting the date in the margin.

Dilke had been ill and was away now recuperating in Hampshire. Keats tried to write him a cheerful letter and succeeded in the main, but he could not restrain himself from breaking into:

I wish I could say Tom was any better. His identity presses upon me so all day that I am obliged to go out—and although I intended to have given some time to study alone I am obliged to write, and plunge into abstract images to ease myself of his countenance his voice and feebleness—so that I live now in a continual fever—it must be poisonous to life although I feel well. Imagine 'the hateful siege of contraries'—if I think of fame of poetry it seems a crime to me, and yet I must do so or suffer—I am sorry to give you pain—I am almost resolv'd to burn this—but I really have not self possession and magnanimity enough to manage the thing otherwise—after all it may be nervousness proceeding from the Mercury—

We know now in the light of medical knowledge that the continued doses of mercury would be 'poisonous to life,' apart from the hours of watching in the hot, close room in which Tom was prisoned. The courageous man who first flung open the windows of a consumptive's room was not yet born.

At first in composition Keats took the midway course of

translation. He made a free rendering of Ronsard's sonnet on Cassandra in which he turned the beautiful line, 'Amour coula ses beautez en mes veines' into one as beautiful :

Love pour'd her beauty into my warm veins.

Unfortunately the translation lacks the last two lines. He had no longer the original before him and could not remember the content of them. It was probably this copy of Ronsard borrowed from Woodhouse which led him to a more complete poetic conception ; the ode, 'A Michel de l'Hôpital,' is one of the recognised sources of 'Hyperion.' Very soon the huge phantasms of the Titans were taking shape in his brain.

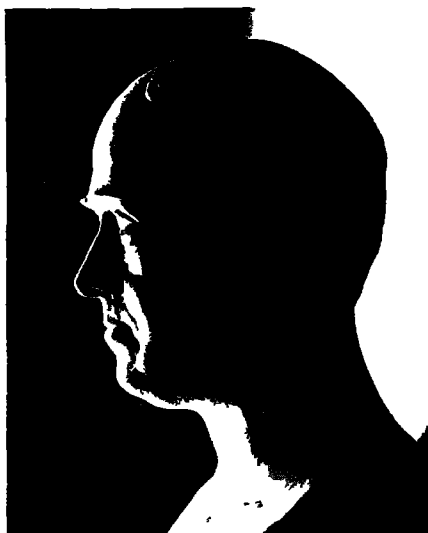
There was another element in the conflict within Keats's young mind and that was the thought of Woman. This thought is not unnatural to man. Keats had felt the normal desire for love and marriage. In July he had written to Reynolds :

I have spoken to you against Marriage, but it was general. the Prospect in those matters has been to me so blank, that I have not been unwilling to die—I would not now, for I have inducements to Life—I must see my little Nephews in America, and I must see you marry your lovely Wife—My sensations are sometimes deadened for weeks together—but believe me I have more than once yearn'd for the time of your happiness to come, as much as I could for myself after the lips of Juliet.—From the tenor of my occasional rhodomontade in chit-chat, you might have been deceived concerning me in these points—upon my soul, I have been getting more and more close to you every day, ever since I knew you, and now one of the first pleasures I look to is your happy Marriage—the more, since I have felt the pleasure of loving a sister in Law.

His expression of despair at his own lack of prospect in marriage seems over-strong for a handsome young man of only twenty-two. It is evident from his letters that for this there was more than one cause.

On September 22nd he wrote to Reynolds about a woman who was momentarily disturbing his mind :

I never was in love—yet the voice and the shape of a Woman has haunted me these two days—at such a time when the relief, the feverous relief of Poetry seems a much less crime—This morning Poetry has conquered—I have relapsed into those abstractions which are my only life—I feel escaped from a new strange



CHARLES ARMITAGE BROWN  
From a bust at the Keats Memorial.



and threatening sorrow.—and I am thankful for it.—There is an awful warmth about my heart like a load of Immortality.

She was a cousin of Reynolds's, a Miss Jane Cox, from the East Indies. Keats wrote more fully of her in his journal-letter of October to George and Georgiana :

At the time I called M<sup>rs</sup>. R. was in conference with her up stairs and the young Ladies were warm in her praises down stairs, calling her genteel, interesting and a thousand other pretty things to which I gave no heed, not being partial to 9 days wonders—Now all is completely changed—they hate her ; and from what I hear she is not without faults—of a real kind : but she has others which are more apt to make women of inferior charms hate her. She is not a Cleopatra, but she is at least a Charmian. She has a rich eastern look ; she has fine eyes and fine manners. When she comes into a room she makes an impression the same as the Beauty of a Leopardess. She is too fine and too conscious of her Self to repulse any Man who may address her—from habit she thinks that nothing *particular*.

From Jane Austen's letters we know that ' being particular ' was in plain English flirting.

I always find myself more at ease with such a woman ; the picture before me always gives me a life and animation which I cannot possibly feel with anything inferior—I am at such times too much occupied in admiring to be awkward or on a tremble. I forget myself entirely because I live in her. You will by this time think I am in love with her ; so before I go any further I will tell you I am not—she kept me awake one Night as a tune of Mozart's might do—I speak of the thing as a passtime and an amuzement than which I can feel none deeper than a conversation with an imperial woman the very ' yes ' and ' no ' of whose Lips is to me a Banquet. I dont cry to take the moon home with me in my Pocket nor do I fret to leave her behind me. I like her and her like because one has no *sensations*—what we both are is taken for granted—

From Keats's letter to Reynolds it would seem that if he were not a little in love with this young woman his admiration of her came very near to it.

He had little conversation with his Charmian because of ' the Miss Reynoldses on the look out ' :

—They think I don't admire her because I did not stare at her  
—They call her a flirt to me—What a want of Knowledge ? She



walks across a room in such a manner that a Man is drawn towards her with a magnetic Power. This they call flirting! they do not know things. They do not know what a Woman is.

Miss Jane Cox, a beauty, heiress and the darling of her grandfather (though at this time she had temporarily quarrelled with him) was probably far less self-conscious with men than the average middle-class girl of her day. Apart from the stultifying of their intellects from lack of education and experience of the world, the restraint on women in society and constant deference to an artificial decorum put up between them and men a barrier in intercourse. I think an easy companionship, an intellectual intercourse with a member of the opposite sex essential to an artist; this Keats had lacked. Losing the women of his family so early, his companionship had been almost entirely masculine. He had come nearest to intimacy with Georgiana, but she had been snatched from him. His letters to the Reynolds girls and to the Misses Jeffrey suggest a relationship of easy fun rather than frank intimacy. He had been seeing less of the Misses Reynolds of late and he had given to Bailey as a reason :

I am certain that our fair friends are glad I should come for the mere sake of my coming; but I am certain I bring with me a Vexation they are better without— . . . I am certain I have not a right feeling towards Women—at this moment I am striving to be just to them but I cannot—Is it because they fall so far beneath my Boyish imagination? When I was a Schoolboy I thought a fair Woman a pure Goddess, my mind was a soft nest in which some one of them slept, though she knew it not—I have no right to expect more than their reality. I thought them ethereal above Men—I find them perhaps equal—great by comparison is very small. . . .

. . . When I am among Women I have evil thoughts, malice spleen—I cannot speak or be silent—I am full of Suspicions and therefore listen to nothing—I am in a hurry to be gone—You must be charitable and put all this perversity to my being disappointed since Boyhood.

The lack of family contact with women added to his feeling of inadequacy towards them sharpened his awareness of femininity. Later, when he was absorbed in Fanny Brawne, he told her that there had been a time 'when even a bit of ribband was a matter of interest to me.'

The only way to cure this feeling of antagonism towards women was, he thought, to try 'to find the root of the evil,' but 'an obstinate Prejudice can seldom be produced but from a gordian complication of feelings, which must take time to unravell and care to keep unravelled.' Perhaps one cause of his uneasiness, probably the root cause, is unconsciously revealed when he adds: 'I do think better of Womankind than to suppose they care whether Mister John Keats five feet high likes them or not.' Keats was very short, and this would, in the absence of the excessive vanity some small men possess, put him at a disadvantage with women. A woman finds it hard to take a man who only reaches up to her shoulder seriously. In this she is logically wrong, but perhaps biologically right.

In another way Keats's experience of women was not normal. He had spent five impressionable years in medicine; he had seen women sick, in child-birth and enduring the agonies of the operation table. In his greatness of heart he suffered with them. Bailey once asked him in a letter: 'Why should Woman suffer?' Keats replied:

Aye. Why should she? 'By heavens I'd coin my very Soul and drop my Blood for Drachmas"! These things are, and he who feels how incompetent the most skyeey Knight errantry is to heal this bruised fairness is like a sensitive leaf on the hot hand of thought.

Later he wrote, 'were it in my choice I would reject a petrarchal coronation—on account of my dying day, and because women have Cancers.'

John Keats, therefore, knew about women both too much and too little. It has been suggested that he was over-sexed, but I find no evidence of this beyond, perhaps, one sentence in a letter to Tom. He says: 'With respect to Women I think I shall be able to conquer my passions hereafter better than I have yet done.' But this was written less than a fortnight after the letter to Bailey about his ill-ease with women and in his following letter to Tom; it seems to me to refer to his feeling of antagonism in their presence.

It was probably Marianne who made him feel uncomfortable at the Reynolds's. Dilke tells us that she was a girl of somewhat saturnine aspect and not popular with many. She

had the defects of her qualities. Later, although she loved her husband, she had many hardships and trials in married life over which her spirit triumphed. The hard girl developed into a magnificent woman. Jane Reynolds must surely have been delightful; she married dear Tom Hood who adored her. The literal quality of her mind tempted him to play on her many little domestic practical jokes which she received with what appears to have been a quite exceptional sweetness of temper.

It is possible that Keats had not until now felt strongly that inward loneliness of the unmated. The family tie was a strong one; his love for his brothers and his little sister (so far as he was allowed to indulge an affection for her) had been in some measure a vicarious satisfaction. There was too, the close friendship with Reynolds. But now one brother was gone, the other almost lost to him, his friend engaged to be married and his desire for the companionship of his young sister thwarted by her guardian. The idea of marriage had been brought forcibly to his mind by the mating of a brother with a girl who seemed an ideal companion and by the happy engagement of his friend. What had seemed a vague project for the future was now brought home to him. He was thinking a good deal about the relation between man and woman.

He now met with another woman who interested him. He does not tell us her name. We only know that he had met her before at Hastings and that she lived at 34 Gloucester Street, Queen Square (now old Gloucester Street). He encountered her near Lamb's Conduit Street. At first he passed her by, but turned back to be greeted by her with evident pleasure. I continue the story in Keats's own words to George:

We walked on towards Islington where we called on a friend of hers who keeps a Boarding School. She has always been an enigma to me—she has been in a Room with you and with Reynolds and wishes we should be acquainted without any of our common acquaintance knowing it. As we went along, some times through shabby, sometimes through decent Streets, I had my guessing at work, not knowing what it would be and prepared to meet any surprise—First it ended at this House at Islington: on parting from which I pressed to attend her home. She consented, and

then again my thoughts were at work what it might lead to, tho' now they had received a sort of genteel hint from the Boarding School.

When they reached Gloucester Street they went upstairs to her sitting-room :

a very tasty sort of place with Books, Pictures a bronze statue of Buonaparte, Music, aeolian Harp ; a Parrot, a Linnet—a Case of choice Liqueurs &c. &c. &c. She behaved in the kindest manner—made me take home a Grouse for Tom's dinner—Asked for my address for the purpose of sending more game—As I had warmed with her before and kissed her—I thought it would be living backwards not to do so again—she had a better taste : she perceived how much a thing of course it was and shrunk from it—not in a prudish way but in as I say a good taste. She contrived to disappoint me in a way which made me feel more pleasure than a simple Kiss could do—She said I should please her much more if I would only press her hand and go away. Whether she was in a different disposition when I saw her before—or whether I have in fancy wrong'd her I cannot tell. I expect to pass some pleasant hours with her now and then : in which I feel I shall, be of service to her in matters of knowledge and taste : if I can I will.

I have no libidinous thought about her—she and your George are the only women à peu près de mon age whom I would be content to know for their mind and friendship alone.

He visited this lady several times, taking home with him more presents of game. Very soon a stronger interest absorbed his attention and probably he completely forgot her. But she is of value in indicating his growing need for an intimacy with a woman.

The high conception of love set out in the idealised love-story in *Endymion* was to him no longer a condition unattainable by man. To George and Georgiana he wrote this significant passage :

Your content in each other is a delight to me which I cannot express—The Moon is now shining full and brilliant—she is the same to me in Matter, what you are to me in Spirit—If you were here my dear Sister I could not pronounce the words which I can write to you from a distance ; I have a tenderness for you, and an admiration which I feel to be as great and more chaste than I can have for any woman in the world.

He also wrote :

As a Man in the world I love the rich talk of a Charmian ; as an eternal Being I love the thought of you. I should like her to ruin me, and I should like you to save me.

To the thought of Georgiana and that other friendly woman he added the conception of woman as mistress ; an integral part of a perfect union, a true marriage since men are but human. The Cleopatra in her infinite variety must be there to charm man if he is not to tire of his woman in the years of lustiest life.

No doubt Keats was, like many sensitive beings and perhaps most artists, shy and a little afraid of marriage ; the surrender is so complete a thing and the risk of unhappiness, of the miserable savour of the half-loaf so great that the disturbance to an essential integrity of being is feared in prospect. He said he hoped he would never marry :

Though the most beautiful Creature were waiting for me at the end of a Journey or a Walk ; though the carpet were of Silk, the Curtains of the morning Clouds ; the chairs and Sofa stuffed with Cygnet's down ; the food Manna, the Wine beyond Claret, the Window opening on Winander mere, I should not feel—or rather my Happiness would not be so fine, my Solitude is sublime. Then instead of what I have described, there is a Sublimity to welcome me home. The roaring of the wind is my wife and the Stars through the window pane are my Children. The mighty abstract Idea I have of Beauty in all things stifles the more divided and minute domestic happiness—an amiable wife and sweet Children I contemplate as part of that Beauty—but I must have a thousand of those beautiful particles to fill up my heart. I feel more and more every day, as my imagination strengthens, that I do not live in this world alone but in a thousand worlds. No sooner am I alone than shapes of epic greatness are stationed around me, and serve my Spirit the office which is equivalent to a King's body guard—then “tragedy with scepter'd pall, comes sweeping by.” According to my state of mind I am with Achilles shouting in the Trenches, or with Theocritus in the Vales of Sicily. Or I throw my whole being into Troilus, and repeating those lines, “I wander, like a lost Soul upon the stygian Banks staying for waftage”, I melt into the air with a voluptuousness so delicate that I am content to be alone.

These things combined with the opinion I have of the generality of women—who appear to me as children to whom I would rather

give a Sugar Plum than my time, form a barrier against Matrimony which I rejoice in . . . I am as happy as a Man can be—that is in myself I should be happy if Tom was well, and I knew you were passing pleasant days—Then I should be most enviable—with the yearning Passion I have for the beautiful, connected and made one with the ambition of my intellect.

He told his brother and sister that Tom was much worse and prepared them for the end :

. . . you must my dear Brother and Sister take example from me and bear up against any Calamity for my sake as I do for your's. Ours are ties which independent of their own Sentiment are sent us by providence to prevent the deleterious effects of one great, solitary grief. I have Fanny and I have you—three people whose Happiness to me is sacred—and it does annul that selfish sorrow which I should otherwise fall into, living as I do with poor Tom who looks upon me as his only comfort—the tears will come into your Eyes—let them—and embrace each other—thank heaven for what happiness you have and after thinking a moment or two that you suffer in common with all Mankind hold it not a Sin to regain your cheerfulness—

As the days darkened into November Tom grew steadily weaker. Friends were kind. Haslam did all he could to help. It is to be regretted that we know so little of William Haslam. The survival of certain letters and the destruction or the mislaying of others has given us an unbalanced estimate of the relative warmth of Keats's friendships. Haslam said after Keats's death that he had put his letters away so carefully that he could not find them. Perhaps in some dusty old trunk stowed in an attic or in the depths of a bank vault these precious records of a kindly intimacy are still lying.<sup>1</sup> The same applies to Cowden Clarke who would appear from the letters to drop almost entirely out of Keats's life after March, 1817. It is true that Keats saw far less of him because his parents, who had given up the school, had retired to Ramsgate and Cowden Clarke lived with them there for several years. But the letters which might have served to remind us of a continued friendship were cut up by the Clarkes for autographs. A letter which has only recently come to light, discovered by Professor Newman I. White at the British

<sup>1</sup> An important letter has lately been sold (see Appendix.)

Museum in a grangerised edition of Moore's life of Byron, shows Keats in closer relationship to the Davenports, mentioned as acquaintances in his letters. It is also the only letter in the third person :

Mr Keats's Compliments to M<sup>rs</sup> Davenport and is sorry to say that his Brother continues in the same state. He and his Brother are extremely sensible of M<sup>rs</sup> Davenport's Kindness—

The letter is endorsed on the back 'Nov. 1818/Jno Keats.' In view of the defective first sentence and the curious inversion in Mrs. Davenport's name it would seem as if it were written in some agitation and near the end.

Severn volunteered to relieve his friend on night duty from time to time, but Keats would allow no one to take his place. His face was haggard and his eyes strained: he told Severn he felt that his own vitality was ebbing away with his brother's life. Both Severn and Haslam feared that his health might be damaged and that he might in the end succumb to the same malady. Severn went so far as to press him not to live with his brother, to take rooms near by. But he was Tom's 'only comfort' and he never left him.

On December 1st Tom died. Early the next morning Brown was awakened by a pressure on his hand. Keats had come to tell him his brother was dead. Brown said nothing. The two remained silent with hands clasped thinking of Tom. Then Brown, his thoughts returning from the dead to the living, said :

"Have nothing more to do with those lodgings,—and alone, too! Had you not better live with me?"

Keats pressed his hand warmly and replied: "I think it would be better."

Tom was buried on December 7th in the family grave at the City Church of St. Stephen's, Coleman Street. He was only nineteen.

## CHAPTER XVI

### *Fanny Brawne and the Spring of 1819 (December, 1818–May, 1819)*

THE GOOD HASLAM INFORMED GEORGE OF HIS BROTHER'S death. Keats did not write ; perhaps was not in a fit state to write, until December 16th, and then his letter, a journal one, was not sent off till after January 4th. After writing :

The last days of poor Tom were of the most distressing nature ; but his last moments were not so painful, and his very last was without a pang. I will not enter into any parsonic comments on death—yet the common observations of the commonest people on death are as true as their proverbs. I have scarce a doubt of immortality of some nature or other—neither had Tom.

he made no further direct reference to his brother's death. The rest of the letter is cheerful, giving news of Georgiana's family and friends. Since Tom's death his studies, he said, had been greatly interrupted, he had 'not the Shadow of an idea of a book' in his head and his pen seemed 'to have grown too goutty for verse.' By January, however, he was able to give them those two buoyant poems, 'Ever let the Fancy roam' and 'Bards of Passion and of Mirth,' and the tender little song, 'I had a dove and the sweet dove died.'

This inability to write during most of December had two causes apart from his grief for Tom. The first was that he was in a low state of health, worn out with nursing and highly nervous. He was probably for a while mentally unbalanced. Severn had wanted to take him away into the West Country, but the weather had been too bad for this.

Wentworth Place, Keats's new home, was then surrounded by open heath and small animals would penetrate into the garden. One day Dilke shot a white rabbit on his ground and Keats declared it to be the spirit of his dead brother returning



to him. Perhaps the soft creature's pitiful eyes were too like the dying boy's. In those days of hard treatment of mental cases it was an absurd delusion to be either derided or ignored. The unimaginative Dilke had the rabbit cooked and brought to table, but Keats's earnest conviction had so played upon the feelings of the household that no one could touch it.

Keats's journal-letter to his brother and sister said nothing of that other cause of his inability to write, his love for Fanny Brawne. This is the more surprising if, as we surmise, they became engaged on Christmas Day, over a week before the letter was despatched. But if he does not speak directly of her it is evident from a scrutiny of the letter that Fanny Brawne was much in his thoughts, and that all the time he is trying not to write about her. About December 16th there is a reference to her mother. He said: 'Mrs. Brawne who took Brown's house for the Summer, still resides in Hampstead—she is . . .' Here he paused, thinking of her daughter. He wrote 'her' and crossed it out, continuing, 'a very nice woman.' But her daughter could not be kept out; indeed, she might come in quite naturally here and not arouse suspicion in the minds of George and little George to whom he had written in his last letter that he would never marry. He took the plunge:

and her daughter senior is I think beautiful and elegant, graceful, silly, fashionable and strange we have a little tiff now and then—and she behaves a little better, or I must have sheered off—

Some days later when he sat down to write he felt the same urge and he made an artful gambit; artful yet amusingly clumsy from a man of such delicate perceptions, tact and power over the pen. He started off by saying, referring particularly to his 'dear sister,' that 'as you were fond of giving me sketches of character you may like a little pic nic of scandal even across the Atlantic.' He then hit off a certain 'Uncle Redhall,' referring to a party of his which he had already described in detail to his brothers and which took place a year before. He added carelessly:

Shall I give you Miss Brawn? She is about my height—with a fine style of countenance of the lengthen'd sort—she wants sentiment in every feature—she manages to make her hair look well—her nostrills are fine—though a little painful—her mouth is bad

and good—her Profil is better than her full-face which indeed is not full but pale and thin without showing any bone—Her shape is very graceful and so are her movements—her Arms are good her hands badish—her feet tolerable—she is not seventeen—but she is ignorant—monstrous in her behaviour flying out in all directions, calling people such names—that I was forced lately to make use of the term *Minx*—this is I think not from any innate vice but from a penchant she has for acting stylishly. I am however tired of such style and shall decline any more of it.

It will be noted that the first stroke of his description is ‘She is about my height,’ a pleasing fact. This would seem a strangely unflattering portrait for a lover to draw. It was written in December: so far as we know they had met in October or November. He had early fallen in love. Later, he told her: ‘the very first week I knew you I wrote myself your vassal; but burnt the letter as the very next time I saw you I thought you manifested some dislike to me.’ Perhaps after the first flash of emotion had died away he had struggled to break through the intangible trammels which are the bitter-sweet prelude to an irrevocable love and had felt resentment against her for robbing him of his freedom. It would appear from the passage which follows in the journal-letter that he made little effort to ingratiate himself with the beloved:

She had a friend to visit her lately—you have known plenty such—Her face is raw as if she was standing out in a frost—her lips raw and seem always ready for a Pullet—she plays the Music without one sensation but the feel of the ivory at her fingers—She is a downright Miss without one set off—We hated her and smoked her and baited her, and I think drove her away—Miss B—thinks her a Paragon of fashion, and says she is the only woman she would change persons with—What a Stupe—She is superior as a Rose to a Dandelion—

This incidentally is a commentary on Georgian manners; it was a brutal age. At bed-time Brown said as he put out the taper what an ugly old woman this Miss Robinson would make, and Keats groaned aloud for at least ten minutes.

On January 2nd Keats mentioned in his journal-letter having dined at Mrs. Brawne’s, but still gave no hint of an understanding between Fanny and himself. He merely commented: ‘I never intend hereafter to spend any time with Ladies unless they are handsome—you lose time to no

purpose.' Poor Miss Robinson ! For a woman to be plain is still a great drawback in life ; then it was a tragedy.

It is difficult to understand why, if Keats were now an accepted lover, no word was said of this to George, the loved brother and confidant. Although an apparent openness of behaviour and a freedom of communication to his friends in his letters rather obscures the fact, Keats was an intensely reserved man where his deepest feelings were involved. In the letters there are only two further references to Tom ; one to his grandmother in the doggerel verses ' There was a naughty boy ' he sent to his sister ; and one indirect reference to his father and mother in speaking of a letter-seal to Fanny Brawne. As it was, in view of his circumstances, bound to be a long one, the withholding of the news of his engagement from his friends might be explained as a measure of prudence. Mrs. Brawne may have wished it : but it seems strange that his brother should have been kept so entirely in the dark. It is probable that disease was already taking its toll of Keats ; from now on we hear frequently of the sore throat. Those with only a slight practical knowledge of tuberculosis know how it warps the mind and accentuates tendencies in the disposition of the patient. Keats had been a reserved man and was now rapidly becoming a secretive one.

With his friends he must have involved himself in many a social difficulty. He had been invited to dine with Mrs. Reynolds on Christmas Day and apparently in the absorption of his love had forgotten all about it. Finding himself with the more pleasing invitation to dine with Mrs. Brawne he had, when at length the memory of Mrs. Reynolds's prior claim reproached him, to write an explanation and an apology a few days before Christmas. He made the singular excuse that he had accepted an invitation elsewhere, thinking he should be in Hampshire at the time. The engagement to join Brown at Chichester and proceed for Christmas to Mr. Dilke's brother-in-law's at Bedhampton had been broken with the convenient excuse of the throat. So does love corrupt our manners and our good intentions !

Fanny Brawne was the daughter of a widow and a girl of good family. Charles Brown was in the habit of letting his house in summer and the Brawnes had inhabited his half of Wentworth Place while he was on the walking tour. When

they removed to Downshire Hill on Brown's return they remained on friendly terms with the Dilkes. Dilke says that Keats met Fanny at his house in October or November. She was eighteen when she first met him, though we may guess, as he thought her only seventeen, that she looked young for her age. His description of her was considered by her family to be a very fair one. Her eyes were a bright blue and she would often accentuate their colour by threading a blue ribbon in her hair, which was mid-brown. She seems to have been a girl who, although not an actual beauty, gave the effect of beauty by a subdued but lovely complexion and by personality. After Keats's death her hair faded and she lost her colouring. Writing in 1825, when she was deathly pale and painfully thin, Gerald Griffin, the writer, found her 'as beautiful, elegant and accomplished a girl as ever—or more so than any I have seen here.' Griffin was an Irishman. This would suggest that she had an extraordinary vivacity. In colder contemplation he admitted that her younger sister was prettier, but not so clever.

With a girl as attractive as Fanny, Keats had probably more than one rival. She was a keen dancer and the Long Room in Well Walk was conveniently near: Keats could not dance. In February we find him wishing that his sister could teach him a few common dancing steps. Miss Brawne spoke fluent French (not a common accomplishment in those days) and a number of Frenchmen visited the house; members of that colony in Hampstead started, at the Revolution, in Oriel House and kept up in numbers by victims of Napoleonic persecution. Keats had a good book-knowledge of the language, but was unable to hold his own in rapid conversation. Miss Brawne's popularity, viewed with the jealous eyes of a passionate man violently in love, gave him many miserable hours. Probably as early in his love-story as January, 1819, he wrote those painful verses to her, beginning: 'Physician Nature, let my spirit bleed!' One of the Dilkes, writing to a friend, said: 'He doesn't like anyone to look at or speak to her.'

Up to now we have had nothing from Fanny Brawne's own hand but one draft letter which those who dubbed her hastily vulgar suburban flirt could twist to their advantage. Since the publication of thirty-one letters written just before

and over several years after Keats's death,<sup>1</sup> those of us who held steadily to a very different view may triumphantly justify ourselves. These are the letters, parts of which were quoted in Amy Lowell's *John Keats*. From them there emerges a lively, practical young woman, not intellectual, perhaps, but of a keen intelligence. After her lover's death she led a quiet, retired life, shunning and disliking society. In Keats's lifetime she may have enjoyed to the full parties, dancing and admiration, but this, after all, is natural enough in a healthy, normal girl. The Fanny of these letters was a great reader; a devourer of novels, though she could laugh at herself for wasting time on 'such trash.' Later she had enough literary taste and ability to write for *Blackwood's*. She was not a great reader of poetry. Her bias was towards the brighter side of life: she loved the theatre, but had a decided preference for comedy.

These qualities would surely have made her an excellent wife for Keats. She was intelligent enough to appreciate, encourage and respect his work and not too keenly interested to break in upon his solitary thinkings and creations. She was practical in worldly affairs and he certainly was not. She had a sense of humour and loved fun; this would have been common, delightful ground. She was a woman lovely and clever enough to supply the 'Charmian' element and one with solid enough qualities to 'wear well.' She was, although lively, of equable temperament. She did not know the meaning of nerves. Much is demanded of an artist's wife, but one feels that the fine, sensible girl we now know Fanny to have been would not have failed Keats. One thing is abundantly clear; she loved him with her whole heart. No one anxious to get a clear picture of the last years of Keats's life can afford to neglect the reading of these letters. Here and, so far as we know, here only, did Keats's love break through her reserve and cry her feelings aloud. On May 23rd, 1821, exactly three months after his death, she wrote:

All his friends have forgotten him, they have got over the first shock, and that with them is all. They think I have done the same, which I do not wonder at, for I have taken care never to

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Fanny Brawne to Fanny Keats, 1820-1824*. Edited by Fred Edgcombe. The Oxford University Press, 1937.

trouble them with any feelings of mine, but I can tell you who next to me (I must say *next* to me) loved him best, that I have not got over it and never shall—It's better for me that I should not forget him but not for you, you have other things to look forward to—and I would not have said anything about him for I am afraid of distressing you but I did not like to write to you without telling you how I felt about him and leaving it to you whether the subject shall be mentioned in our letters—

Fanny Brawne could never speak of her first love and she wore his ring until her death. It was twelve years before she married.

Her letters are well written, with a certain feeling for style, and carry on over four years the stories of the two girls whom Keats loved.

Neither Reynolds nor Severn liked Fanny. Reynolds called her 'that poor idle thing of womanhood to whom he has unaccountably attached himself,' and Severn thought her a cold and conventional mistress. He considered the figure of Sacred Love in Titian's picture, 'Sacred and Profane Love,' to be an accidentally authentic delineation of Fanny Brawne. The picture shows a woman of serene glance, plump softly aquiline features and hair of a light brown verging on chestnut. The only portrait we have of her is a miniature painted in later life, showing a thinner face and darker hair, but the same clear, steady look. The shape of the mouth, with a full lower lip, is strikingly similar. A photogravure of the miniature can be seen in *The Letters of John Keats* and also in the new volume of Fanny Brawne's letters.

It is probable that in the dislike of these two friends there was more than a little jealousy. A man is seldom satisfied with his friend's choice of a love, and Keats's friends were strongly attached to him. He made little or no exertion to acquire friends, most of whom, he himself remarked, had come to him through George; but the glowing genius and the rich humanity within him drew like a magnet.

One may guess that Fanny Brawne, as girls are apt to do, in stepping into Keats's life, overthrew all his plans. In a letter to Haydon towards the end of December he spoke of 'a little money which may enable me to study and to travel three or four years.' He was anxious to 'exist without

troubling the printer's devil.' This frugal plan would not seem to include a wife.

This admission of money in hand was an unwise one; Haydon, who had been asking him for a loan, now pressed him again. He was in the grip of money-lenders and at his wit's end to know where to turn. Keats, temporarily short of money, applied to Taylor with the naïve admission that twenty of the thirty pounds for which he asked were for a friend. Apparently Taylor jibbed and Keats had to approach his trustee, but 'from the alertness and suspicion of Abbey: and especially from the affairs being still in a Lawyer's hand—who has been draining our Property for the last 6 years,' he was unsuccessful. He was clearly not aware of the extent of his resources; he left his accounts entirely in Abbey's hands. Keats had persisted until April and when this explanation of his inability to lend was sent to Haydon he replied in a characteristically unreasonable and selfish way. Keats was hurt. He said that he had recently been engaged 'on a Book' but that Haydon had maimed him again. He would if Haydon still could not obtain the money elsewhere take him into the City and see what he could do with Abbey in the way of personal persuasion. Did the cautious Abbey meet Haydon and capitulate to his bounding, buoyant personality? The thought of the possible interview is amusing. Keats certainly did succeed in raising the money from somewhere.

The humble, unselfish tone of Keats's letters to this man whose struggling 'genius' he and many of his contemporaries placed far too high is both pathetic and ironic to us who, but for the *Autobiography* and his connection with the great men of his time, would have almost wholly forgotten that clumsy Phæton, the painter Haydon.

Apart from the memory of Tom, money-worries and the menace of a constantly recurring sore throat, this period must have been for Keats a singularly happy one. Not only could he delight in his love, but he had the tranquillity of a congenial house-mate in Brown, and the homes of both the Dilkes and the Brawnes were thrown open to him. For Mrs. Brawne he had a deep affection and must have felt that to some extent she might take the place of the mother he had loved so dearly. The torch of his life flamed up in a blaze of poetry and most of his finest work was done now. In January he

wrote 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' in February the fragment of 'The Eve of St. Mark,' in April 'La Belle Dame sans Merci,' the 'Ode to Psyche' and the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' and in May the 'Ode to a Nightingale.'

The letters to Fanny Keats during these months are more frequent. He seemed in his new happiness to yearn after his little sister and probably longed to show her to his love. But Abbey was definite in his refusal to allow her to visit at Hampstead again: the two Fannys did not meet until months after Keats's death. Abbey even went so far as to try to prevent Fanny receiving letters from her brother.

There is one delightful elder-brotherly touch in a letter at the beginning of February. Fanny was restless and discontented at having to leave school, but the time will come, he told her, when she would be more pleased with life:

look forward to that time and, though it may appear a trifle, be careful not to let the idle and retired Life you lead fix any awkward habit or behaviour on you—whether you sit or walk—endeavour to let it be in a seemly and if possible a graceful manner.

In March Fanny was presumably being prepared for Confirmation and faced by a set of questions on dogma which frightened her, she sent them to John. Had he not written to her: 'In all your little troubles think of me with the thought that there is at least one person in England who if he could would help you out of them'? Keats went up to town and selected a little book for her; a book which Mrs. Marie Adami has suggested may have been *The Catechism set forth in the Book of Common Prayer*, 1817. He also set down the answers to her questions clearly and concisely, ending his letter 'Your affectionate Parson John.' This letter and the last letter from her brother, written and signed for him by Fanny Brawne,<sup>1</sup> were, with H. Buxton Forman's knowledge, withheld from the packet she sent over to him from Spain in 1881 for publication in his four-volume edition, *The Poetical Works and other Writings of John Keats*. They remained until recently in her family as heirlooms.

In January Keats and Brown had gone together into Hampshire. The stay at Bedhampton and Chichester was comparatively uneventful. Keats's throat was troublesome and he

<sup>1</sup> Now in the Keats Museum.



did not go outside the garden more than two or three times. He employed his enforced retirement in writing 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' which he mentioned modestly to his brother as 'a little Poem.' One expedition he did make of dubious entertainment; an excursion in the rain to see a Chapel consecrated. He told George and little George about it in his own lively manner:

Brown I and John Snook the boy, went in a chaise behind a leaden horse Brown drove, but the horse did not mind him—This Chapel is built by a Mr. Way a great Jew converter—who in that line has spent one hundred thousand Pounds. He maintains a great number of poor Jews—Of course his communion plate was stolen—he spoke to the Clerk about it—The Clerk said he was very sorry—adding 'I dare shay your honour its among ush' . . . they sanctified the Chapel—and it being a wet day consecrated the burial ground through the vestry window.

The aspersion on the converts must not be taken too seriously. It is probably only an early example of a popular music-hall jest.

There is an amusing joint letter from Brown and Keats, full of shocking puns, addressed to Dilke at the Navy Pay Office. In Keats's portion this occurs: 'Viz. Remember me to Wentworth Place and Elm Cottage—not forgetting Millamant—' Mrs. Adami<sup>1</sup> has suggested that Elm Cottage was a tall bow-fronted house, in a block of four, at the top of Downshire Hill, one of which is still standing at the corner of Pilgrim's Lane. Elm Cottage must surely have been Mrs. Brawne's residence, for to whom else but Fanny could Keats give the name of the 'fashionable' and 'strange' Millamant, perhaps the most fascinating heroine of the English theatre? This message, unless it were either a joke or an attempt to throw dust in Dilke's eyes, would suggest that he was not corresponding with Fanny during this absence; there are no letters extant. This might be taken as evidence against placing their engagement so early as December, 1818, though it is difficult to know how else to explain the statement in Fanny's letter to the other Fanny in 1821 that the Christmas Day of three years ago was 'the happiest day I had ever spent.' She might have first realised his love for her on that day;

<sup>1</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, May 16th, 1936.

but the burst of fine poetry from him in the spring does not suggest the unsettled mind of an unaccepted lover.

Keats had not been for some months now in the mood for society. The trouble in his throat, too, kept him in from the winter night air and he had his work and his other sweet absorption. His friends saw little of him unless they came up to him at Hampstead. The Wylies he visited with regularity for Georgiana's sake. Severn was with him a good deal. They walked together and Keats took him to visit the Brawnes. Mrs. Brawne took a strong liking for Severn: it is probable he was not given much opportunity to improve on the acquaintanceship with her daughter, for there was a jealous eye upon him. Severn was a handsome, lively young man.

With the immediate Leigh Hunt circle Keats was now entirely out of sympathy. He had visited at Novello's in December and commented: 'there was a complete set to of Mozart and punning—I was so completely tired of it that if I were to follow my own inclinations I should never meet any one of that set again not even Hunt.' It is noticeable that Keats was finding mankind in the mass more and more tiring. Once he had been a sociable man. Apart from the lack of savour to a lover in company when the beloved is absent, the disease was probably already slightly warping his mind and making him self-conscious and suspicious. Keats had always spoken of himself as a suspicious man, but his friends saw no signs of it. If this were so, and he were not merely more clear-sighted than most men, he succeeded in completely disguising it in the earlier days.

There was one friend in whom, in common with Reynolds and Rice, his judgment had been at fault. He had taken Bailey to be a much simpler and more straightforward man than he was. Now he was disillusioned. When Keats had been at Oxford he had pitied his friend sighing gustily after 'a little Jilt in the country' who would have none of him,

little supposing as I have since heard, that he was at that very time making impatient love to Marian Reynolds—and guess my astonishment at hearing after this that he had been trying at Miss Martin.

The 'little Jilt' was probably Tamsine Leigh, to whom,

her granddaughter said, according to family gossip, Bailey had proposed without success.

Mr. M. Buxton Forman remarks in defence of Bailey that Keats might have been misinformed about Miss Martin who married another Bailey whose Christian name was Edward. Bailey had proposed to Marianne and been rejected but had begged her to take time to think it over. He then went north and the next thing the family heard was that he was engaged to Miss Gleig, a daughter of the Bishop of Brechin.

He showed his correspondence with Marian to Gleig—returned all her Letters and asked for his own—he also wrote very abrupt Letters to Mrs. Reynolds. . . . The great thing to be considered is—whether it is want of delicacy and principle or want of Knowledge and polite experience—And again Weakness—yes that is it—and the want of a Wife—yes that is it. . . . Marian's obstinacy is some excuse—but his so quickly taking to miss Gleig can have no excuse—except that of a Ploughmans who wants a wife.

To do Bailey justice his friends do not seem to have suspected a mercenary motive although a Bishop can, to a poor curate, be quite a useful father-in-law.

Marianne's 'conduct has been very upright throughout the whole affair—She liked Bailey as a Brother.' He does not sound an ingratiating lover; he 'used to woo her,' said Keats, 'with the Bible and Jeremy Taylor under his arm.' Keats felt secure in a condemnation of Bailey's conduct because Rice, Bailey's great friend, who 'would not make an immature resolve,' had abandoned him entirely. With himself in mind perhaps, Keats added, speaking of the Reynolds women:

If you mentioned the word Tea pot some one of them came out with an a propos about Bailey—noble fellow—fine fellow! was always in their mouths—this may teach them that the man who ridicules romance is the most romantic of Men—that he who abuses women and slights them—loves them the most—that he who talks of roasting a Man alive would not do it when it came to the push—and above all that they are very shallow people who take everything literally.

He added to that a fine, thoughtful utterance:

A Man's life of any worth is a continual allegory—and very few eyes can see the Mystery of his life—a life like the scriptures,

figurative—which such people can no more make out than they can the hebrew Bible. Lord Byron cuts a figure—but he is not figurative—Shakespeare led a life of Allegory: his works are the comments on it—

In this journal-letter to George there is no mention of Fanny Brawne, but with his marriage probably in mind he says he has been considering whether he shall go to Edinburgh to study and become a Physician :

I am afraid I should not take kindly to it ; I am sure I could not take fees—and yet I should like to do so : it's not worse than writing poems, and hanging them up to be fly-blown on the Review shambles.

He had also been to see Mr. Abbey who had suggested he should become a hat-maker. It will be remembered that Mr. Abbey had himself an interest in hat-making.

Another passage in this letter is a prelude to the Ode on Indolence. He had been playing cricket and had got a black eye from a blow with the ball ; only the second black eye, he said, he had in his life and that, curiously enough, outside his fighting schooldays. Was the other black eye an honourable badge of his fight with the butcher-boy<sup>1</sup> in the previous month ? He had found him tormenting a kitten and had fought with him in a blind-alley in Hampstead for nearly an hour until the brute had to be led home. We are indebted for this information to Cowden Clarke who came to take his leave of him before going to live permanently with his family at Ramsgate : so was this friend of his vigorous youth spared the pain of seeing him gradually succumb to the dread disease. Keats was apparently at this time ' in fine health and spirits.'

This second black eye had shaken him up and after Brown had applied a leech he had gone to bed.

This morning I am in a sort of temper indolent and supremely careless : I long after a stanza or two of Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*. My passions are all asleep from my having slumbered till nearly eleven and weakened the animal fibre all over me to a delightful sensation about three degrees on this side of faintness—if I had teeth of pearl and the breath of lillies I should call it langour—but as I am I must call it Laziness. In this state of

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Dilke, May 7th, 1830, George called him ' a scoundrel in livery.'

effeminacy the fibres of the brain are relaxed in common with the rest of the body, and to such a happy degree that pleasure has no show of enticement and pain no unbearable frown. Neither Poetry, nor Ambition, nor Love have any alertness of countenance as they pass by me : they seem rather like three figures on a greek vase—a Man and two women who no one but myself could distinguish in their disguise. This is the only happiness ; and is a rare instance of advantage in the body overpowering the Mind.

When he wrote or finished the Ode on Indolence in May the man and two women (on a type of Greek vase a Bacchus or priest in god's guise followed by two priestesses) became three female figures, Love, Ambition and his ' demon poesy.' This ode, though imperfect and unpolished, is full of cloudy beauty. There is no distinct colour in it ; the highest note is that suggested when the spell of the shadowy enchantment is lifting in the ' newly budded vine ' about the open window. There are few high vowels and the consonants are blurred. The movement of it seems to shift and change softly like a dove-coloured cloud. One line is haunting :

My sleep had been embroider'd with dim dreams,

a purely romantic line.

But in March, writing to his brother, he could not detach himself from reality so completely. He has heard that Haslam's father is dying and must go to town the next day to see his friend. ' This is the world ; thus we cannot expect to give way many hours to pleasure.' He went on to reflect that few of us can get near to that state of disinterestedness which was so often before him as man's goal. ' Even so we have leisure to reason on the misfortunes of our friends ; our own touch us too nearly for words.' In a piece of beautiful balanced prose he set down in part his new attitude to life :

From the manner in which I feel Haslam's misfortune I perceive how far I am from any humble standard of disinterestedness—Yet this feeling ought to be carried to its highest pitch as there is no fear of its ever injuring Society—which it would do I fear pushed to an extremity—For in wild nature the Hawk would lose his Breakfast of Robins and the Robin his of Worms—the Lion must starve as well as the swallow. The greater part of Men

must make their way with the same instinctiveness, the same unwandering eye from their purposes, the same animal eagerness as the Hawk. The Hawk wants a Mate, so does the Man—look at them both they set about it and procure one in the same manner. They want both a nest and they both set about one in the same manner—they get their food in the same manner—The noble animal Man for his amusement smokes his pipe—the Hawk balances about the Clouds—that is the only difference of their leisures. This it is that makes the Amusement of Life—to a speculative Mind. I go among the Fields and catch a glimpse of a Stoat or a fieldmouse peeping out of the withered grass—the creature hath a purpose and its eyes are bright with it. I go amongst the buildings of a city and I see a Man hurrying along—to what? the Creature has a purpose and his eyes are bright with it. But then, as Wordsworth says, “we have all one human heart”—there is an electric fire in human nature tending to purify—so that among these human creatures there is continually some birth of new heroism. The pity is that we must wonder at it: as we should at finding a pearl in rubbish.

I have no doubt that thousands of people never heard of have had hearts completely disinterested: I can remember but two—Socrates and Jesus—their Histories evince it. What I heard a little time ago, Taylor observe with respect to Socrates may be said of Jesus—That he was so great a man that though he transmitted no writing of his own to posterity, we have his Mind and his sayings and his greatness handed to us by others. It is to be lamented that the history of the latter was written and revised by Men interested in the pious frauds of Religion. Yet through all this I see his splendour.

He had grown since he sat upon a rock by the sea and ‘saw too distinct into the core of an eternal fierce destruction.’

He then fell again into that speculation of a superior being looking down and seeing with amusement man’s activities, the small strife of a human quarrel, as he himself is entertained ‘with the alertness of a Stoat or the anxiety of a Deer.’

Though a quarrel in the Streets is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine; the commonest Man shows a grace in his quarrel—By a superior being our reasonings may take the same tone—though erroneous they may be fine—This is the very thing in which consists poetry; and if so it is not so fine a thing as philosophy—For the same reason that an eagle is not so fine a thing as a truth—Give me this credit—Do you not think I strive

—to know myself? Give me this credit—and you will not think that on my own account I repeat Milton's lines

“How charming is divine Philosophy  
Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose  
But musical as is Apollo's lute”—

No—not for myself—feeling grateful as I do to have got into a state of mind to relish them properly—Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced—Even a Proverb is no proverb to you till your Life has illustrated it.

This idea of some being looking down on the world goes through his life like a silver thread from the moon as ‘Maker of sweet poets,’ from the moon-goddess in *Endymion* to the conception of a fixed star ‘which can never cease to be open lidded and stedfast over the wonders of a great Power’ linked in this rich period of poetic growth with love, that basic force which alone gives a man full power and contentment, in the sonnet, ‘Bright Star, would I were stedfast as thou art.’

The ‘Bright Star’ sonnet was copied by Fanny Brawne into the first volume of Cary's ‘Dante’ which had been given to her by Keats. He had himself written down in it the sonnet, ‘A Dream, after reading Dante's episode of Paolo and Francesca.’

On the ‘Dream’ sonnet Keats wrote to his brother :

The fifth canto of Dante pleases me more and more—it is that one in which he meets with Paolo and Francesca—I had passed many days in rather a low state of mind, and in the midst of them I dreamt of being in that region of Hell.

The dream was one of the most delightful enjoyments I ever had in my life—I floated about the whirling atmosphere as it is described with a beautiful figure to whose lips mine were joined as it seem'd for an age—and in the midst of all this cold and darkness I was warm—even flowery tree tops sprung up and we rested on them sometimes with the lightness of a cloud till the wind blew us away again—I tried a Sonnet upon it—there are fourteen lines but nothing of what I felt in it—O that I could dream it every night—

As Hermes once took to his feathers light  
When lulled Argus, baffled, swoon'd and slept  
So on a delphic reed my idle spright  
So play'd, so charm'd so conquer'd, so bereft  
The dragon world of all its hundred eyes

And seeing it asleep so fled away:—  
 Not to pure Ida with its snow cold skies,  
 Nor unto Tempe where Jove grieved that day,  
 But to that second circle of sad hell,  
 Where in the gust, the whirlwind and the flaw  
 Of Rain and hailstones lovers need not tell  
 Their sorrows—Pale were the sweet lips I saw  
 Pale were the lips I kiss'd and fair the form  
 I floated with about that melancholy storm—

This journal letter so rich in poetry contains beside, 'La Belle Dame sans Merci,' 'The Ode to Psyche,' the two sonnets on Fame, 'To Sleep,' 'If by dull rhymes our English must be chain'd' (an experiment in form), and that poem of sorrow:

Why did I laugh tonight? No voice will tell:  
 No God no Deamon of severe response  
 Deigns to reply from heaven or from Hell—  
 Then to my human heart I turn at once—  
 Heart! thou and I are here sad and alone;  
 Say, wherefore did I laugh? O mortal pain!  
 O Darkness! Darkness! ever must I moan  
 To question Heaven and Hell and Heart in vain!  
 Why did I laugh? I know this being's lease  
 My fancy to its utmost blisses spreads:  
 Yet could I on this very midnight cease  
 And the world's gaudy ensigns see in shreds.  
 Verse, fame and Beauty are intense indeed  
 But Death intenser—Death is Life's high mead.

Keats is careful to explain that the sonnet was the outcome of a passing mood and 'written with no Agony but that of ignorance,' but it is hard to believe that this was the case. George knew nothing nor was he to be given any hint of that great consuming love, at once a joy and a pain.

He had also of late been hurt by a painful reminder of his dead brother's sufferings and of a wanton cause for their increase. He had been turning over old papers and had found the 'Amena' correspondence. We can guess from the careful way Tom docketed in his clerkly hand letters received that he was by nature methodical. He seems to have made copies of the letters he sent in reply to 'Amena.' It would appear that he had to a certain extent kept John in the dark about the correspondence. We do not know when the deception was revealed but it was said that his misery at the discovery threw Tom into a far worse state of health. Keats, when he discovered who was responsible for the hoax, dropped Wells's



acquaintance. The last mention of Wells in the letters is in January, 1818, but this does not, of course, fix the date of the termination of their friendship.

Keats's anger at Wells's deception is revealed in a passage of this journal-letter, the only passage written by him in vindictive mood :

I do not think death too bad for the villain—The world would look upon it in a different light should I expose it—they would call it a frolic—so I must be wary—but I consider it my duty to be prudently revengeful. I will hang over his head like a sword by a hair. I will be opium to his vanity—if I cannot injure his interests—He is a rat and he shall have ratsbane to his vanity—I will harm him all I possibly can—I have no doubt I shall be able to do so—Let us leave him to his misery alone except when we can throw in a little more—

But in the greatness of his mind Keats could rise up from the fire of thwarted passion and of anger. The following passage not only amplifies the speculation on life given above but links on to the 'Chambers of Life' allegory of the year before (see page 184) :

The common cognomen of this world among the misguided and superstitious is 'a vale of tears' from which we are to be redeemed by a certain arbitrary interposition of God and taken to Heaven—What a little circumscribed straightened notion! Call the world if you Please "The vale of Soul-making". Then you will find out the use of the world. . . . I say '*Soul making*' Soul as distinguished from an Intelligence—There may be intelligences or sparks of the divinity in millions—but they are not Souls till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself . . . '

I will call the *world* a School instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read—I will call the *human heart* the *horn Book* used in that School—and I will call the *Child able to read*, the *soul* made from that *School* and its *hornbook*. Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a Soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways! Not merely is the Heart a Hornbook, It is the minds Bible, it is the Minds experience, it is the teat from which the Mind or intelligence sucks its identity. As various as the Lives of Men are—so various become their Souls, and thus does God make individual beings, Souls, Identical Souls of the Sparks of his own essence—This appears to me a faint sketch of a system of Salvation which does not affront our reason and humanity

—I am convinced that many difficulties which christians labour under would vanish before it—there is one which even now Strikes me—the Salvation of Children—In them the Spark or intelligence returns to God without any identity—it having had no time to learn of and be altered by the heart—or seat of the human Passions— . . .

Seriously I think it probable that this System of Soul-making—may have been the Parent of all the more palpable and personal Schemes of Redemption, among the Zoroastrians the Christians and the Hindoos.

This surely is a remarkable utterance for a man of twenty-four. It is possible that his mind had been stimulated by the meeting a few days before with that inspired talker, Coleridge. In his old age Coleridge gave two separate accounts of this meeting and neither of them tallies with Keats's version. Coleridge suggested that it had been a momentary encounter. There are details that, from a knowledge of Keats, cannot be accepted. He speaks of his figure as 'loose' and 'slack' and says that when Keats had left him and his companion he returned, saying: 'Let me carry away the memory, Coleridge, of having pressed your hand!' He remarked to Mr. Green: 'There is death in that hand.' There was a heat and dampness in it. This may be an excusable touch of drama in an old man speaking of a young one already in his grave though probably it had a good foundation. Coleridge was after all a man of acute perceptions and with some knowledge of medicine. There may have been already physical signs of the disease in Keats beyond the troublesome sore throat.

Keats himself says he met Coleridge in Millfield Lane, Hampstead, with Mr. Green, his demonstrator at Guy's. He joined them 'after enquiring by a look whether it would be agreeable.' They walked at an 'alderman-after-dinner pace' for nearly two miles. The tide of Coleridge's mellifluous conversation flowed over him; that marvellous talk 'far above singing,' 'the music of thought.' He touched in his tangential way on many subjects and Keats gave a rough list of them to his brother. Among them were, 'Nightingales, Poetry—on Poetical Sensation—Metaphysics—Different genera and species of Dreams . . . a dream accompanied by a sense of touch—single and double touch—A dream related.' Soon after there came from Keats the sonnet 'On a Dream,'

the above philosophical passage, and in May the 'Ode to a Nightingale.' Keats told his brother that he heard Coleridge's voice as he came towards him and heard it as he moved away. 'I had heard it all the interval—if it may be called so. He was civil enough to ask me to call on him at Highgate.' So far as we know Keats did not call. Perhaps the first impact with such a determined talker had stunned him.

On the lighter side the letter to George contains the extempore 'When they were come unto the Faery's Court,' the 'Chorus of Faeries,' the verses on Brown in the Spenserian manner which taken conversely give us a vivid picture of the full-fleshed, worldly man, a reference to the velocipede 'the nothing of the day,' his critique on Reynolds's *Peter Bell* and a piece of rich hyperbole on a thin lady for whom Henry Wylie had an inclination. It is seldom that these joyous passages can be extracted from the main body of a letter, but this one is fortunately self-contained :

Says I, Will Henry have that Miss ——, a lath with a boddice, she who has been fine drawn—fit for nothing but to be cut up into Cribbage pins, to the tune of 15-2 ; one who is all muslin ; all feathers and bone ; once in travelling she was made use of as a lynch pin ; I hope he will not have her, though it is no uncommon thing to be *smitten with a staff* ; though she might be very useful as his walking-stick, his fishing-rod, his tooth-pick, his hat-stick (she runs so much in his head)—let him turn farmer, she would cut into hurdles ; let him write poetry, she would be his turn-style. Her gown is like a flag on a pole ; she would do for him if he turn freemason ; I hope she will prove a flag of truce ; when she sits languishing with her one foot on a stool, and one elbow on the table, and her head inclined, she looks like the sign of the crooked billet—or the frontispiece to Cinderella or a tea-paper wood-cut of Mother Shipton at her studies ; she is a make-believe—She is bone side a thin young 'oman—But this is mere talk of a fellow creature ; yet pardie I would not that Henry have her—Non volo ut eam possideat, nam, for, it would be a bam, for it would be a sham—

Reynolds's *Peter Bell* was an anonymous skit in anticipation of Wordsworth's poem and was written in a few hours after seeing the advertisement of *Peter Bell*. Taylor and Hessey published it quickly and it was soon 'in every bookseller's window in London.' Within two months it had run through three

editions. The joke was made more pungent by the fact that Reynolds had intuitively hit upon the stanza form selected by Wordsworth for his *Peter Bell*. Reynolds made fun of the homelier side of Wordsworth's muse in such lines as :

'Tis Peter Bell—'tis Peter Bell,  
Who never stirreth in the day ;  
His hand is wither'd—he is old !  
On Sunday he is us'd to pray,  
In winter he is very cold.

As the parody progressed the verses became more absurd :

His stick is made of wilding wood,  
His hat was formerly of felt,  
His duffel cloak of wool is made,  
His stockings are from stock in trade,  
His belly's belted with a belt.

It ends magnificently. 'Peter Bell,' surveying the tombstones in the churchyard by the light of a lantern, comes to Wordsworth's grave. At this discovery he mutters the inscription :

He mutters ever—' W.W.  
Never more will trouble you, trouble you.'

Keats's review of this 'false Florimel' in *The Examiner* was, in his own words, 'a little politic—I say something for and against both parties.' The more the author 'may love the sad embroidery of the *Excursion*, the more will he hate the coarse samplers of Betty Foy and Alice Fell.' Here he was true to the majority of the younger readers of Wordsworth. He added that in the present work there was 'such a pernicious likeness in the scenery, such a pestilent humour in the rhymes, and such an inveterate cadence in some of the stanzas' that 'this Simon Pure is in points the very man.' Reynolds had taken as motto to his parody, 'I do affirm that I am the REAL SIMON PURE.' To his brother Keats wrote : 'I and my conscience are in luck to-day' : he could speak his mind and still be politic to the other party. 'If we are,' he continued in his notice, 'one part amused with this, we are three parts sorry that any one who has any appearance of appreciating WORDSWORTH, should show so much temper at this really provoking name of *Peter Bell*.' Viewed impartially Reynolds's joke was not perhaps in the best of taste though the

richness of it mitigated its impudence. It was followed by several other anonymous parodies. This unwelcome publicity stimulated the sale of the real *Peter Bell* so that a second edition was soon called for. People bought it to compare with the parodies. In his second edition Wordsworth, however, inadvertently capped the joke: he cut out many of the more humourless lines. When Reynolds's *Peter Bell* reached Italy it stimulated Shelley into contributing yet another *Peter Bell* in the same year, *Peter Bell the Third*, by Miching Mallecho, Esq.

The preface Reynolds put into the mouth of the pseudo-Wordsworth is so amusing an exaggeration of Wordsworth's egotism that perhaps a portion of it might be quoted here:

It has been my aim and my achievement to deduce moral thunder from buttercups, daisies, celandines, and (as a poet, scarcely inferior to myself, hath it) "such small deer." Out of sparrows' eggs I have hatched great truths, and with sextons' barrows have I wheeled into human hearts, piles of the weightiest philosophy.

At the pleasant house in Hampstead there were changes imminent. The Dilkes' boy, Charles Wentworth, now nine years of age, had entered Westminster School. Charley was his father's idol. 'One would think,' said Keats, 'Dilke ought to be quiet and happy—but no—this one Boy makes his face pale, his society silent and his vigilance jealous.' Dilke left the comfortable house and garden he had made for himself and went to live in Town in lodgings near the school. Mrs. Brawne moved into Wentworth Place.

Keats at first thought of moving away: the letter of the strict etiquette of the day might have demanded this. But the thought of having his beloved so near him must have overcome this prudent resolution. In May the two lovers were living in joined houses under one roof and in a common garden.

## CHAPTER XVII

### *The Isle of Wight and Winchester* (May–October, 1819)

WENTWORTH PLACE IS NOT LARGE. DILKE, IN THE FASHIONABLE phraseology of the day, described the two houses as cottages but to us they are not that. The rooms are high and well proportioned. Excluding the basement, Brown's house had four and Dilke's five rooms. Dilke's two living-rooms were divided by folding-doors and could be thrown into one large enough in which to give a party. The house would just hold in comfort Mrs. Brawne and her three children; beside Fanny there were Sam, a boy of fourteen, and a little sister, Margaret. In 1838 the two houses were bought by Miss Chester, an actress who held the Court appointment of reader to George IV, and she converted them into one house, adding a large drawing-room which is entered through Brown's house-door on the eastern side of the building. Wentworth Place, now the Keats Memorial House, is full of the peace and dignity of age though tragedy has owned it. Keats was ill and unhappy within its walls; in 1828 Sam Brawne died there of the same disease; and in November, 1829, Mrs. Brawne came to a terrible end. Holding aloft a candle to light a friend out of the house her dress caught fire and she died as the result of burns.

In the garden, the design of which is little altered since Keats's day, there are some fine old trees. The glory of them is a two hundred-years-old mulberry tree now supporting his great age with a crutch but still producing abundant fruit. The plum tree under which the 'Nightingale' Ode is said to have been written is still there though it is now only an ivy-clad stump. There was before the house a hedge of lauristinus, but this has gone, to be replaced by a wooden fence. To the

west of the house there is the Museum full of precious relics of Keats and his friends.

To a man in love the period of engagement is necessarily a trying one because the months of waiting between the falling in love and marriage are an unnatural delay. To Keats, an intensely passionate man, the nearness of his beloved must have been almost unbearable. There are indications in his letters that she herself was not yet fully awakened to love. The response is often far slower in a woman and Fanny was young. Before his death she had learned to love him wholly.

Although his love for her inspired most of his finest work, Keats could not write when he was with her: work in some form or other was, apart from the creative urge within him, a necessity, as money was short. He would soon have temporarily to leave Wentworth Place because of Brown's habit of letting his house for the summer. At the end of May Keats wrote to Miss Jeffrey asking her to find a cheap lodging for him but not in, or too near Teignmouth: there the memory of Tom would be too painful. He spoke of an alternative to this retirement:

I have the choice as it were of two Poisons (yet I ought not to call this a Poison) the one is voyaging to and from India for a few years; the other is leading a fevrous life alone with Poetry—This latter will suit me best; for I cannot resolve to give up my studies.

The idea of becoming a surgeon on board ship may have originated in Dr. Darling, Haydon's doctor, who had himself served in an East Indiaman. It might have materially benefited Keats's health. Although the conditions on board were at that time so rough, he was a good sailor and the fresh salt air might have proved a drastic remedy. A distraction of interests would not have hurt his mind and might have prevented morbidities that hastened the progress of the disease. This he realised in part himself: did he not 'strive to know' himself? In a second letter to Miss Jeffrey he wrote:

Your advice about the Indiaman is a very wise advice, because it just suits me, though you are a little in the wrong concerning its destroying the energies of Mind: on the contrary it would be the

finest thing in the world to strengthen them—To be thrown among people who care not for you, with whom you have no sympathies forces the Mind upon its own resources, and leaves it free to make its speculations of the differences of human character and to class them with the calmness of a Botanist. An Indian is a little world. One of the great reasons that the English have produced the finest writers in the world is, that the English world has ill-treated them during their lives and foster'd them after their deaths. They have in general been trampled aside into the bye paths of life and seen the festerings of Society.

After developing this idea by examples he added :

I have been very idle lately, very averse to writing ; both from the overpowering idea of our dead poets and from abatement of my love of fame. I hope I am a little more of a Philosopher than I was, consequently a little less of a versifying Pet-lamb.

Miss Jeffrey had suggested to him the lovely village of Bradley, but Keats decided not to go there for the moment as Rice, ill and obliged to leave London for a time, had asked him to accompany him to the Isle of Wight. Living, he assured Keats, could be very cheap on the seaward side of the Island. Cheapness was a prime necessity ; by early June Keats was too poor to afford the coach-fare to Walthamstow to see his sister. A return of the sore throat prevented him from walking.

The Keats's money-affairs were now complicated by the decision of Mrs. Midgley Jennings to file a bill in Chancery against the estate. Keats had been counting on his share of Tom's money, but now it seemed that it might be held until Fanny was of age. If Mrs. Jennings won her case Mr. Abbey would be 'very undeservedly in the wrong box,' and for this reason Keats felt he could not press him for money. He might in fairness to his guardian even feel it necessary to hand over to him his remaining capital. When Abbey gave him the disagreeable news about the possibility of a Chancery suit he also gave Keats some information rather more gratifying. George had a daughter. Keats had been for the past months in letters to America anticipating with joy the birth of the first child. He had assumed it would be a boy and prophesied that he would become the first American poet.



As Keats was in such very low water financially he applied to Haydon for a return of part of the thirty pounds he had lent him. He was now obliged to depend for his daily sustenance upon Brown. As he put it to his brother in his own vivid way: 'Now in this see-saw game of Life I got nearest to the ground and this chancery business rivetted me there so that I was sitting in that uneasy position where the seat slants so abominably.' An application to Haslam, who had been lent money by George, resulted in the prompt return of a part of it, but Haydon would not, or could not, repay a penny. He did not appear in his monstrous egotism to bother his head about the matter although Keats had made it plain that soon his income might cease entirely. Keats felt that he might at least have tried to sell some of his drawings to raise money. He could not feel the same towards Haydon after this; he continued the acquaintance but was no longer on intimate terms with him. It was this cooling and an uncomfortable consciousness of obligation to Keats which probably led Haydon to defame him after his death. He represented him to his friend Miss Mitford and others as a spineless boy who, after the attacks in the Tory press, 'was scarcely ever sober for weeks together.' One of Haydon's instances of 'irregularities' to Miss Mitford was that he 'covered his tongue & throat as far as he could reach with cayenne pepper in order to have the delicious coolness of claret in all its glory.' This sounds like a mere boyish prank, a student's trick: Albert Smith tells us that the wags in his medical school (Middlesex) used cayenne pepper in their broad joking. When a man came into the dissecting-room dazed with heavy drinking the night before they would give him a pot of beer laced with cayenne. When this had taken its effect they would prop him up in a corner to have his sleep out.

By July 1st Keats was at Shanklin, staying in a cottage a little back from the sea. 'Our window,' he told his sister, 'looks over house tops and Cliffs onto the Sea, so that when the Ships sail past the Cottage chimneys you may take them for Weathercocks.' Eglantine Cottage, which local tradition pointed out as his lodging, was at the south end of the High Street. It has now been pulled down.

Keats had been caught on top of the coach on the way

down in a heavy shower of rain. He was far from well and was not made the better for living with Rice whose illness and suffering weighed upon him. He was feeling the wrench of the parting from his beloved whom he would not see for a long time and might never see again. He had told her that, if his Fate did not turn up a winning or at least a court card, he would never return to London. He wrote to her :

I have never known any unalloy'd Happiness for many days together : the death or sickness of some one has always spoilt my hours—and now when none such troubles oppress me, it is you must confess very hard that another sort of pain should haunt me. Ask yourself my love whether you are not very cruel to have so entrammelled me, so destroyed my freedom. Will you confess this in the Letter you must write immediately and do all you can to console me in it—make it rich as a draught of poppies to intoxicate me—write the softest words and kiss them that I may at least touch my lips where yours have been. For myself I know not how to express my devotion to so fair a form : I want a brighter word than bright, a fairer word than fair. I almost wish we were butterflies and liv'd but three summer days—three such days with you I could fill with more delight than fifty common years could ever contain. But however selfish I may feel, I am sure I could never act selfishly. . . . Though I could centre my Happiness in you, I cannot expect to engross your heart so entirely—indeed if I thought you felt as much for me as I do for you at this moment I do not think I could restrain myself from seeing you again tomorrow for the delight of one embrace. But no—I must live upon hope and Chance. In case of the worst that can happen, I shall still love you—but what hatred shall I have for another !

Fanny in her reply evidently made some protest against his decision to keep away from her, asking whether their next meeting depended on 'horrid people.' Perhaps some prudent elderly friends had broken in upon their young delight with talk of money, an establishment and the risks of matrimony on love and poetry, and she thought that Keats had been unduly influenced by them. Mrs. Brawne was wise enough not to interfere, though she privately hoped that her daughter's fancy for this charming but poor young man would 'go off.' Keats replied to his love's protest :

Do understand me, my love, in this. I have so much of you in my heart that I must turn Mentor when I see a chance of harm

beffaling you. I would never see any thing but Pleasure in your eyes, love on your lips, and Happiness in your steps. I would wish to see you among those amusements suitable to your inclinations and spirits; so that our loves might be a delight in the midst of Pleasures agreeable enough, rather than a resource from vexations and cares. But I doubt much, in case of the worst, whether I shall be philosopher enough to follow my own Lessons: if I saw my resolution give you a pain I could not.

She had also protested that he thought too much of her beauty and that he had implied that she did not love him. He continued:

Why may I not speak of your Beauty, since without that I could never have lov'd you. I cannot conceive any beginning of such love as I have for you but Beauty. There may be a sort of love for which, without the least sneer at it, I have the highest respect and can admire it in others: but it has not the richness, the bloom, the full form, the enchantment of love after my own heart. So let me speak of your Beauty, though to my own endangering; if you could be so cruel to me as to try elsewhere its Power. You say you are affraid I shall think you do not love me—in saying this you make me ache the more to be near you.

We find him indulging like a common man in all the sweet lunacies of love, kissing her handwriting in the hope that she has done the same and sleeping with her letters under his pillow. Love had made him humble as he had never been before. He had been humble in his attitude to ultimate achievement in poetry, to Shakespeare, to Milton, but to the world at large he had shown, and still continued to show, the legitimate pride of conscious genius. Love must bring a humbling of the spirit in a feeling of unworthiness. So does it help the growth of the soul. He could now contemplate with equanimity himself struggling in the scrum of life, in the ignoble scramble for a livelihood. He wrote to Reynolds:

I have of late been moulting: not for fresh feathers and wings: they are gone, and in their stead I hope to have a pair of patient sublunary legs. I have altered, not from a Chrysalis into a butterfly, but the Contrary, having two little loopholes, whence I may look out into the stage of the world: and that world on our coming here I almost forgot. The first time I sat down to write, I co<sup>d</sup> scarcely believe in the necessity of so doing. It struck me as a great oddity.

Yet the very corn which is now so beautiful, as if it had only took to ripening yesterday, is for the market: so why sh<sup>d</sup> I be delicate—

Towards the end of July Brown came to Shanklin and Rice took his departure, much to Keats's relief. He liked Rice, he felt he knew and liked him better for having lived with him, but his illness was a heavy burden. The bad state of his health was made the more trying to Keats by his valiant attempts to mask his pain by a forced jollity. Brown's robust health was ever a satisfaction and restful to Keats. With Rice he had not been able to work much; the two were 'like Sauntering Jack and idle Joe.' But now the dire shadow of sickness no longer fell between him and the man he lived with, Keats began to write and study with intensity. The one blot on his pleasure at Brown's arrival was the account he brought of an indisposition of Miss Brawne's. He wrote to her:

You cannot conceive how I ache to be with you: how I would die for one hour—for what is in the world? I say you cannot conceive; it is impossible you should look with such eyes upon me as I have upon you: it cannot be. . . . If you should ever feel for Man at the first sight what I did for you, I am lost. Yet I should not quarrel with you, but hate myself if such a thing were to happen—only I should burst if the thing were not as fine as a Man as you are as a Woman.

Apparently Keats did not share his friends' opinion of him as a good-looking and exceptionally striking man. He felt himself 'not a thing to be admired':

I hold that place among Men which snubnos'd brunettes with meeting eyebrows do among women—they are trash to me—unless I should find one among them with a fire in her heart like the one that burns in mine. You absorb me in spite of myself—you alone: for I look not forward with any pleasure to what is call'd being settl'd in the world; I tremble at domestic cares—yet for you I would meet them, though if it would leave you the happier I would rather die than do so.

The letter ended with:

I will imagine you Venus to-night and pray, pray, pray to your star like a Hethen.

Your's ever, fair Star.

This would suggest that the sonnet, 'Bright Star, would I were stedfast as thou art,' was written in the 'little coffin' of a bedroom at Shanklin which, when he left his cheerful friend and the abstractions of his work, was filled with his love's warm presence. He could now at least lose the keen consciousness of her being during the day. At work with Brown upon the tragedy *Otho the Great*, he saw her only dimly 'through the mist of Plots speeches, counterplots and counterspeeches—'

The Lover is madder than I am—I am nothing to him—he has a figure like the Statue of Maleager and double distilled fire in his heart. Thank God for my diligence! were it not for that I should be miserable. I encourage it, and strive not to think of you—but when I have succeeded in doing so all day and as far as midnight, you return as soon as this artificial excitement goes off more severely from the fever I am left in—

'Diligence' would seem a mild word for his feverish activity. He was at work upon 'Lamia' and possibly 'Hyperion,' writing the dialogue of *Otho* and yet, to Brown's amazement, he could entirely absorb himself for a part of the day in the study of Greek and Italian. His mental capacity was so great that surely it would, apart from disease, griefs and his devouring love, have worn out the strongest body. From time to time he speaks of himself as an idle man, but this term could only have been a comparative one.

Keats and Brown wrote their tragedy with Kean in their eye. It was to a great extent a pot-boiler. Keats had no illusions about it; he called it a 'tolerable tragedy.' Compared with the turgid dramas of the time it was more than tolerable. The speeches are short, clear, easy to 'get over' and carry on the story. The plot is, together with the characters, frankly melodramatic. I fear it would be dull to a modern audience, but the proof of a play is in the acting and *Otho* has not stood the test of performance. In 1838 Severn made some effort to get it performed by gifted English amateurs in Rome but nothing came of it. The actors were enthusiastic, but it looks as if Brown put difficulties in the way.

The method of collaboration was not a happy one. In four acts Keats 'only acted as Midwife' to the plot as Brown

gave it. He supplied the dialogue without enquiry as to the course of the action. When they arrived at the fifth act he demanded to know its course and rejected some of Brown's suggestions as too melodramatic and possibly evocative of giggles from the audience. He wrote this act 'in accordance with his own views.' The two had a good deal of fun over writing the play, both making absurd suggestions. Brown wanted an elephant introduced, but Keats objected that they had 'not historical reference within reach to determine as to Otho's Menagerie.' To his brother Keats gave a few lines which he apparently considered to be fine ones :

Not as a Swordsman would I pardon crave,  
But as a Son : the bronz'd Centurion  
Long-toil'd in forreign wars, *and whose high deeds*  
*Are shaded in a forest of tall spears,*  
*Known only to his troop,* hath greater plea  
Of favour with my Sire than I can have—

The italics are Keats's own. I think he could have quoted finer lines. When the villain Albert dies, groaning, Ludolph exclaims :

There goes a spotted soul  
Howling in vain along the hollow night—

and speaks of

His most uneasy moments, when cold death  
Stands with the door ajar to let him in.

His hope for the success of this play was, not only that it would bring him in some money, but that it would add to his worldly reputation and help him to market his poems to better advantage. He said :

My name with the literary fashionables is vulgar—I am a weaver boy to them—a Tragedy would lift me out of this mess. And mess it is as far as it regards our Pockets.

He was not, however, too sanguine. To this statement of his every playwright will sigh out a doleful acquiescence : 'There cannot be greater uncertainties east, west, north, and south than concerning dramatic composition.' His hopes of an early performance were already dashed by the news that Kean was going to America.

It is typical of his extreme conscientiousness in art that

Keats had not turned his attention to the drama long before. The theatre was starved for good plays and with all the men he knew connected with the theatre, Reynolds, Dilke, Brown himself and others, it would have been easy to get consideration. One of his ambitions was 'to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean has done in acting.' The fine work of 1819 was regarded as a mere preliminary to dramatic work: referring to 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' he wrote to Taylor:

Two or three such Poems if God should spare me, written in the course of the next 6 years, wo<sup>d</sup> be a famous Gradus ad Parnassum altissimum. I mean they would nerve me up to the writing of a few fine plays—my greatest ambition when I do feel ambitious.

It is interesting, although futile, to speculate how the survival of this great restless brain might have affected the literature and the thought of the century and especially how it might have stimulated growth in the theatre. Keats and Kean would have made a formidable combination. The art of play-writing might not have dwindled away into crude melodrama, or the miserable and artificial translations from the French, to wait so long for the first reviving touch of Tom Robertson. Kean's acting tended to the naturalistic, and we may take it from Keats's remark above that his revolution in dramatic writing would have been in the same direction; the direction the drama has actually taken up to modern times. It is probable that there were men of the theatre with an eye on young Keats and that even the imperfect and conventional *Otho* made some stir, for a notice of his death was put in the *Theatrical Pocket Magazine* for 1821.

When they had finished *Otho* in late August, Brown pointed out a subject for a tragedy in the reign of Stephen, beginning with his defeat by the Empress Maud and ending with the death of his son Eustace.

"The play must open," he said, "with the field of battle when Stephen's forces are retreating. . . ."

"Stop!" cried Keats, "I have been too long in leading-strings. I will do all this myself."

He then immediately wrote the bare two hundred lines that are the fragment *King Stephen*.

This fragment, although reminiscently Elizabethan, is genuine stuff. The construction of it is close, and that is a rare quality in a first play. There is not a word wasted or a simile employed which does not add to the total effect. He plunges too directly into the action for the comfort of the audience, but that is a common and venial fault in young playwrights. To the vanquished army, retiring in confusion, we get the conquering enemy contrasted in a vivid phrase :

. . . 'Tis a gallant enemy ;  
How like a comet he goes streaming on.

This came out of observation. There had been a comet visible while Keats was at Shanklin.

After the turmoil of the first scene amid the conquered we are taken among the victors, breathing freely again, and the scene opens with a serene and beautiful passage :

Now we may lift our bruised vizors up,  
And take the flattering freshness of the air,  
While the wide din of battle dies away  
Into times past, yet to be echoed sure  
In the silent pages of our chroniclers.

Keats at once, as a true dramatist, makes use of this idea to develop the story as the First Knight inquires :

Will Stephen's death be mark'd there, my good Lord,  
Or that we gave him lodging in yon towers ?

But Stephen is not yet captured. Stephen at bay is given incisively,

His gleaming battle-axe being slaughter-sick,  
Smote on the morion of a Flemish knight,  
Broke short in his hand.

The narrative leads directly on to the third scene where we find Stephen unarmed, but still superb in defiance ; only quailing before the insult of a blow from a common soldier. He claims death as a right if he cannot surrender to the Duke of Gloucester. The scene ends fittingly in the sound of trumpets proclaiming the triumph of might against his single valour and we are left in suspense as to his fate.

Scene 4 is the Presence Chamber of the victorious Empress Maud, and here occurs an amusing human touch. Maud



makes a rather pompous speech about bending an attentive ear to sage advisers and demanding from them plain speaking. When she sees that Gloucester intends to take her at her word and plead for the fallen King she stops him before a dozen words are out of his mouth. Gloucester goes and the Earl of Chester tries to turn Maud against him by hints of over-courtesy to the fallen King. He works upon the weak Empress and she cries :

A frost upon his summer !

To which Chester quickly rejoins :

A queen's nod  
Can make his June December. Here he comes.

But, alas, he does not come nor ever will come. The fragment ends here.

This plunging deep into 'imaginary interests' was, he told Fanny, his only relief from 'the throng of Jealousies that used to haunt' him. His mind was now 'heap'd to the full ; stuff'd like a cricket ball.' The tormenting thought of her was now comparatively remote. He told her this in the security that she would understand. 'I know the generallity of women would hate me for this.' He was in a mood so detached that the vexed question of ways and means, of means to attain her, no longer worried him :

It may be a proud sentence ; but, by heaven, I am as entirely above all matters of interest as the Sun is above the Earth—and though of my own money I should be careless ; of my Friends I must be spare.

There is little love in this letter. He was not happy enough for 'silken Phrases, and silver sentences.' He could no more use soothing words to her than if he were at that moment 'engaged in a charge of Cavalry.' He had hurt her pride in his last letter by saying :

So you intend to hold me to my promise of seeing you in a short time. I shall keep it with as much sorrow as gladness ; for I am not one of the Paladins of old who livd upon water grass and smiles for years together—

He now protested that this was written 'in simple innocent childish playfulness' ; he had not really intended to imply

compulsion on her part. Anyhow, finances would prevent him seeing her. He was living on his friend's money.

He was tired of Shanklin and wanted to get away from it. One may guess that a soft climate did not suit him; that, much as he might admire the luxuriances of the Island, when he was among the lush, leafy lanes and the rounded hills he viewed them with a bilious eye. He had stoutly maintained the beauty of Devonshire among the grander scenes of the north, but while under 'the Acrasian spell' of its climate he had railed against it. He was, too, by nature a roamer and never cared to be long in one place. He hoped when he married never to '*settle*—turn into a pond, a stagnant Lethe—a vile crescent, row or buildings. Better be imprudent moveables than prudent fixtures.' Brown and he decided to go across to Winchester where there might be the additional advantage of a library.

He had been working far too hard and had taken little exercise, never getting farther than Bonchurch. Perhaps Brown, too, was feeling the effect of confinement; a week before they left the Island he set out, knapsack on back, to tramp about. Keats became so absorbed in his work that when Brown returned, although he liked 'his society as well as any Man's,' he had broken in upon him 'like a Thunderbolt.' It was while they were still at Shanklin that Brown made the drawing of Keats which is now in the National Portrait Gallery. He had been out sketching and Keats, who had accompanied him, had playfully challenged him to a trial of skill. On the return to their lodging Keats was tired. As he lounged back with his fist against his cheek, Brown opened his portfolio, took out paper and pencil and quietly set to work.

Keats enjoyed his crossing to the mainland. He wrote to Fanny Brawne:

One of the pleasantest things I have seen lately was at Cowes. The Regent in his Yatch . . . was anchored opposite—a beautiful vessel—and all the Yatches and boats on the coast, were passing and repassing it; and curcuiting and tacking about it in every direction—I never beheld any thing so, silent, light and graceful—

A small naval boat heavily manned came too near their vessel and their bowlines caught her mast and snapped it.

Keats admired the discipline of the sailors : ' Neither officer nor man in the whole Boat moved a Muscle—'

With Winchester he was charmed though he found no library there. His room was large and its outlook on to a blank wall he found a positive relief after his surfeit of the picturesque. He liked its wooded situations ; the ' old Buildings mixed up with Trees ' and set in downs the air from which was ' worth sixpence a pint.' He enjoyed the Cathedral and above all he enjoyed the mellow calm of the place. The weather had been fine for a month or more now ; Keats loved hot weather, ' a fair atmosphere to think in.' The only disturbance to the grateful warmth and quiet was the sound of ' a fiddle that now and then goes like a gimlet through my Ears. Our Landlady's Son not being quite a Proficient.'

In a letter to Reynolds on September 21st, he gave a delightful impression of the old, sleepy town :

Yesterday . . . was a grand day for Winchester. They elected a Mayor. It was indeed high time the place should receive some sort of excitement. There was nothing going on : all asleep : not an old maid's sedan returning from a card party : and if any old woman got tipsy at Christenings they did not expose it in the streets. The first night tho' of our arrival here there was a slight uproar took place at about 10 o' the Clock. We heard distinctly a noise patting down the high Street as of a walking cane of the good old Dowager breed ; and a little minute after we heard a less voice observe " What a noise the ferril made—It must be loose " —Brown wanted to call the Constables, but I observed 'twas only a little breeze, and would soon pass over.—The side streets here are excessively maiden-lady like : the door steps always fresh from the flannel. The knockers have a staid serious, nay almost awful quietness about them.—I never saw so quiet a collection of Lions' & Rams' heads. The doors most part black, with a little brass handle just above the keyhole, so that in Winchester a man may very quietly shut himself out of his own house.

It was suggested by W. Courthope Forman that Keats's lodging in Winchester was in the west portion of Colebrook Street, a quiet backwater at the north-east of the Cathedral. On the regular walk he took for an hour before dinner he went out by the garden gate at the rear of the house, crossed Paternoster Row and

into the Cathedral yard, which is always interesting ; then I pass under the trees along a paved path, pass the beautiful front of the Cathedral, turn to the left under a stone door way,—then I am on the other side of the building—which leaving behind me I pass on through two college-like squares seemingly built for the dwelling place of Deans and Prebendaries—garnished with grass and shaded with trees.

He then passed through King's Gate and into College Street where he would go by the house in which Jane Austen died two years before. He walked across meadows and ' a country alley of gardens ' to the foundation of St. Cross, the ancient and beautiful hospital for old men about which Trollope wrote thirty-six years later in *The Warden*. From St. Cross he walked through open country beside ' a beautifully clear river.' To Reynolds he said :

How beautiful the season is now—How fine the air. A temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking, chaste weather—Dian skies—I never lik'd stubble fields so much as now—Aye better than the chilly green of the Spring. Somehow a stubble-plain looks warm—in the same way that some pictures look warm—This struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it.

The poem he composed was the masterpiece in which he caught all the rich serenity of our English September when the weather is kind to us, the ' Ode to Autumn.'

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,  
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun ;

His only regret was that in this halcyon weather he had not been well enough to bathe, either in the sea at Shanklin or in the clear, cool river.

The old quiet of Winchester set his mind swinging back to that ancient town of Canterbury which has remained more mediæval in character to this day than the Hampshire cathedral town ; to Canterbury and Chaucer and to the fragment of a poem he had written in the spring and promised to send to George. He now copied it in his journal-letter saying : ' I know not whether I shall ever finish it.' The fresh beauty of ' The Eve of St. Mark,' the serene poem with its loved detail, makes us marvel, I think, more than in any other poem at Keats's ability to use words as if they were new, as

new as when 'old Chaucer used to sing.' There is the clean bright effect of an illumination, a pre-Pre-Raphaelite presentation without the mannered stiffness of that movement :

Her shadow, in uneasy guise,  
 Hover'd about, a giant size,  
 On ceiling-beam and old oak chair,  
 The parrot's cage, and panel square ;  
 And the warm angled winter screen,  
 On which were many monsters seen,  
 Call'd doves of Siam, Lima mice,  
 And legless birds of Paradise,  
 Macaw and tender Avadavat,  
 And silken-furr'd Angora cat.  
 Untir'd she read, her shadow still  
 Glower'd about, as it would fill  
 The room with wildest forms and shades,  
 As though some ghostly queen of spades  
 Had come to mock behind her back,  
 And dance and ruffle her garments black.

The influence of 'Christabel' on the metre comes out clearly in the last two lines. Compare them with

The one red leaf, the last of its clan,  
 That dances as often as dance it can.

If all the letters to Fanny Brawne have come down to us, there are none between August 16th and September 14th. In the 'flint-worded' letter of August 16th he had said that he must not give way to the thought of her, 'but turn to my writing again—if I fail I shall die hard.' Persuaded as he was that Fanny did not love him greatly, he may have thought it kinder in view of his harsh circumstances to neglect her and so give her an excuse to break off the connection.

She must have been badly hurt and all the more as she did not apparently understand his work or place a high value on it, considered impersonally. He himself did not resent this but rejoiced that she liked him for himself alone and was not one of those women who 'would like to be married to a Poem and to be given away by a Novel.' She might not feel anxiety for his welfare as she would probably hear of his movements through letters from Brown to the Dilkes, but she would be wounded both in her pride and her love. Probably she danced more, visited more, laughed a little

louder and became outwardly more 'silly, fashionable and strange.' But she still loved him.

Keats had been forced to continue borrowing from Brown although Brown was 'not at all flush.' Brown's generosity to Keats was all the greater in a man who, according to his friends, was by nature rather 'near.' His means were small and he had always eked them out by sharing his home with another man so that the five pounds a month that Keats paid him when they were housekeeping together must have been a welcome addition to his income.<sup>1</sup> It is true that after Keats's death he presented to George a bill *with interest* but this addition, savouring more of the money-lender than the friend, can be explained by a knowledge of Brown's character. He had a rigid sense of justice and the courage of his opinions and was violently prejudiced against George who he considered had not only neglected to supply his brother with money, but had taken money from him at a time when he needed it sorely. Dilke, who later knew more about the Keats's money affairs than anyone, made a complete defence of George, but Brown would hear none of it. The dispute led unhappily to the breaking of an old friendship.

Very soon Keats and Brown were reduced almost to shillings and something had to be done. Keats wrote reluctantly to Taylor asking for a loan secured by a bill with Brown's name to it. Brown affixed a note to the letter corroborating this and promising ample security. Keats mentioned the tragedy from which they hoped 'to share moderate Profits.' He added :

I feel every confidence that if I choose I may be a popular writer ; that I will never be ; but for all that I will get a livelihood—I equally dislike the favour of the public with the love of a woman—they are both a cloying treacle to the wings of independence. I shall ever consider them (People) as debtors to me for verses, not myself to them for admiration—which I can do without. . . .

You will observe at the end of this if you put down the Letter "How a solitary life engenders pride and egotism!" True: I know it does—but this Pride and egotism will enable me to write finer things than any thing else could—so I will indulge it. Just so much as I am humbled by the genius above my grasp,

<sup>1</sup> From unpublished letters of Dilke's and Brown's in the Keats Museum.

am I exalted and look with hate and contempt upon the literary world—

This was, to say the least, high-handed to a publisher who has lost on a previous publication and from whom he wanted to borrow money. The phrase about the love of woman does not strike pleasantly on the ear with the thought of the patient, waiting girl at Hampstead.

Taylor was naturally rather taken aback by this letter and forwarded it to Woodhouse for his opinion. That constant admirer's comment was 'I wonder how he came to stumble upon that deep truth that "people are debtors to him for his verses and not he to them for admiration"? Methinks such a conviction on anyone's mind is enough to make half a Milton of him.' Woodhouse would be glad to help with a loan although he was at the moment short of money. He could spare fifty pounds. 'Whatever,' he wrote, 'People regret that they could not do for Shakespeare or Chatterton, because they did not live in their time, that I would embody into a Rational principle and (with due regard for certain expediencies) do for Keats.' Two of the contingencies Woodhouse wished to avoid was that Brown should share in the loan and that Keats might lend some of it to one or other of his needy friends. 'I wish he could be cured of the vice of lending—for in a poor man it is a vice,' Woodhouse thought that an obligation on the part of Keats might eventually prove beneficial to 'the business.'

Keats's letter had been sent on from Fleet Street to Retford, where Taylor was staying, went to Woodhouse and returned to him. This entailed a delay of a good many days of which Keats could know nothing. He wrote again. This time he asked merely for 'a Month's cash,' telling how he and Brown had written to several friends but that all their correspondence seemed to be dropping into a void. Four days later Hessey sent him a bank post bill for thirty pounds, money which had been privately supplied by Woodhouse. In acknowledging it Keats told him that Brown had been able to borrow from a friend in Hampshire. In addition to this, Keats himself had heard that there was a sum of money waiting for him at the post office at Chichester, sent there by mistake. Apart from this money they now had sixty pounds between them. He said cheerfully: 'To be a complete Midas I



THE KEATS MEMORIAL HOUSE

From a water-colour by E. J. Lambert of Hampstead, in the possession of Fred Edgcumbe Esq.





suppose some one will send me a pair of asses ears by the waggon—'

In the middle of September he was hurried to Town by a letter from George which must be placed before Abbey. George was in desperate need of money. The young couple were living at Henderson, Kentucky, in the same house with Audubon, the naturalist. Audubon had persuaded George to take shares in a boat carrying cargoes up and down the Ohio river. The boat had sunk and George's money was lost. They were living at the moment on a loan from a kindly neighbour. When Mr. Abbey read the letter 'he appeared really anxious about it' and promised he would forward some money due to George as quickly as possible. He 'behaved extremely well' to Keats and invited him to drink tea on the following Monday evening.

Keats had arrived in Town on the morning of Saturday, September 11th. The appointment with Abbey obliged him to stay over the week-end. He called in at Fleet Street and found that Taylor was still at Retford. He then spent melancholy hours 'walking about the streets as in a strange land.' Reynolds was in Devonshire and the Dilkes away. The Reynolds women, once his dear friends, he seems by this time to have completely turned against. They disapproved, we know, of his engagement to Fanny Brawne. Perhaps, directly or indirectly, he knew of this. Hampstead he would not visit. He finished up a miserable day by going half-price to Covent Garden.

When he entered Taylor and Hessey's shop that morning he had surprised Hessey and Woodhouse talking together. He told them about the Chancery suit, implying that he had come up to London to dissuade his aunt from proceeding with it. With characteristic family pride he said nothing of George's difficulties.

He had brought up with him the manuscripts of 'Lamia' and 'The Eve of St. Agnes.' No doubt with the urgent necessity of making money in mind, he asked Hessey if they could be published immediately. Hessey was not responsive to the idea.

Woodhouse invited Keats to breakfast next morning in the Temple. He stayed with his friend until three in the afternoon when Woodhouse departed on holiday to Weymouth. They talked of his poetry and Keats read 'Lamia'

to him. Woodhouse found it difficult entirely to catch the meaning of the poem. Keats read it badly and he was, he said, always slow to catch the purport of poetry and needed to read it over several times. But he realised the drama of the story. He wanted to know why Keats had not mentioned 'Isabella' to Hessey. Keats said he could not bear it now; he thought it 'mawkish.' Woodhouse defended 'its great tenderness and simplicity' and assured Keats that it would please the public more than 'The Eve of St. Agnes.' Woodhouse was right in thinking that 'Isabella' would appeal strongly to his own generation. It is a simple story, easy to follow and full of what modern editors call 'heart interest.' It was of their own world and its pathos was within their comprehension. 'The Eve of St. Agnes' is more purely a work of art, creating its own world of love and faery.

Keats showed his revised 'Eve of St. Agnes' to Woodhouse and on one important point Woodhouse 'abused it for a full hour by the Temple clock.' In the thirty-sixth stanza Keats had made it quite clear that a physical union took place between the two lovers. Woodhouse objected that this rendered the poem 'unfit for ladies, and indeed scarcely to be mentioned to them.' Keats retorted that he did not write for ladies but for men; 'he should despise a man who would be such a eunuch in sentiment as to leave a maid with that character about her, in such a situation: and should despise himself to write about it, etc., etc., etc., and this sort of Keats-like rhodomontade.' So Woodhouse reported the matter to Taylor. Taylor's reply was definite:

I cannot but confess to you that it excites in me the strongest sentiments of Disapprobation—Therefore, my dear Dick, if he will not so far concede to my Wishes as to leave the Passage as it originally stood, I must be content to admire his Poems with some other Imprint.

The two versions we possess, though clear enough in intent to the initiate, might be limited to a dream-marriage in the minds of the innocent: it must therefore be presumed that Keats took this threat to heart.

He walked with his friend to the coach and they took leave in the noisy yard. Woodhouse had taken his place

inside the coach when Keats, looking up at him, promised to write, saying :

“ And if it *should be in verse*, I daresay you will forgive me.”

All this Woodhouse told Taylor, adding ‘ I make no apology for stuffing my letters with these Keatsiana. I am sure nothing else I could say would have half the Interest. And I deem myself in luck to have such a subject to write about.’

Keats dined that day with Georgiana’s mother and brothers. He did not show them George’s letter, ‘ for better time will certainly come and why should they be unhappy in the meantime.’

The next morning he wrote a letter to Hampstead :

Am I mad or not? I came by the Friday night coach and have not yet been to Hampstead. Upon my soul it is not my fault. I cannot resolve to mix any pleasure with my days : they go on like one another undistinguishable. If I were to see you to day it would destroy the half comfortable sullenness I enjoy at present into downright perplexities. I love you too much to venture to Hampstead, I feel it is not paying a visit but venturing into a fire. . . . Knowing well that my life must be passed in fatigue and trouble, I have been endeavouring to wean myself from you : for to myself alone what can be much of a misery ? As far as they regard myself I can despise all events : but I cannot cease to love you. This morning I scarcely know what I am doing. . . . I shall return to Winchester to-morrow ; whence you shall hear from me in a few days. I am a Coward, I cannot bear the pain of being happy : ’tis out of the question : I must admit no thought of it.

Yours ever affectionately

John Keats.

This letter appears a selfish one unless we admit that he was convinced that Fanny did not love him much. He was being cruel to be kind. George’s difficulties, which he felt bound to relieve in future so far as it lay in his power, had raised a further barrier between him and his love. Fanny Brawne was, after all, only nineteen and at that age to an ordinary girl life is full, emotion facile and the memory short. But Fanny was not an ordinary girl. In the fascination of his love, the preoccupation with his own feelings, he could not have studied her nature and seen behind the lively manner, the easy social grace, an intense reserve of feeling. One feels she was an inarticulate woman ; certainly in later years

she could never speak of her love to anyone except Fanny Keats.

During the day Keats went over to Walthamstow to see his sister and in the evening he kept his appointment with Abbey. His guardian was friendly over the tea-cups. He had evidently, however much he might deplore the eccentricity of John's conduct, accepted him as an established poet. After all, there might be money in it. Look at Lord Byron—not that he approved of the fellow. And, of course, Byron was Lord Byron. This boy was only John Keats. In Keats's own words, he then

began blowing up Lord Byron while I was sitting with him, however says he the fellow says true things now & then; at which he took up a Magasine and read me some extracts from Don Juan, (Lord Byron's last flash poem) and particularly one against literary ambition.

When Keats left Abbey he walked up Cheapside, but returned to put some letters in the late post at the General Post Office in Lombard Street. As he walked back he met Mr. Abbey in Bucklersbury. They walked together through the Poultry as far as the hatter's shop in which Abbey had an interest. He spoke of the shop in such a way as to imply that he wanted Keats 'to make an offer to assist him in it.'

It is a curious fact (though one which is impossible to square with the known facts of Keats's life) that at 74 Cheapside, where Cheapside and Bucklersbury join Poultry, there was a hat manufacturer named Joseph Keats. The shop was not far from Abbey's warehouse and only two doors from 76 Cheapside, where the Keats brothers had lived in 1816 and early 1817. There was also at 1 Pancras Lane an 'R. and J. Keats, warehousemen.' Added to this, in Poultry itself there was, at No. 14, a second firm of hatters, Keats & Co.

Keats did not return to Winchester the next day but remained in Town until Wednesday the 15th. We do not know his movements beyond that, some time over the long week-end, he went to see Rice. While he was there Haslam called in. Haslam was in a like case with himself, in love. Keats professed to find Haslam's love 'very amusing.' He wrote to George :

Nothing strikes me so forcibly with a sense of the ridiculous as love. A Man in love I do think cuts the sorryest figure in the world. Even when I know a poor fool to be really in pain about it, I could burst out laughing in his face. His pathetic visage becomes irresistable. . . . Somewhere in the Spectator is related an account of a Man inviting a party of stutterers and squinters to his table. 't would please me more to scrape together a party of Lovers, not to dinner—no to tea. There would be no fighting as among Knights of old.

He then gave George 'a few nonsense verses' on the subject, beginning :

Pensive they sit, and roll their languid eyes.  
Nibble their toasts, and cool their tea with sighs,

The verses are amusing and yet painful reading. Keats was, to use a colloquialism, laughing on the wrong side of his face.

After Keats's return to Winchester he did not (so far as we know) write to Fanny. He was alone now for Brown had 'gone a visiting.' It would seem as if he had temporarily succeeded in stifling his love and had attained to some serenity of mind. On September 21st he wrote to Reynolds : 'I am surprized at the pleasure I live alone in,' and 'I have lately skirk'd some friends of ours, and I advise you to do the same, I mean the blue-devils—I am never at home to them.' He told his brother :

Whenever I find myself growing vapourish, I rouse myself, wash and put on a clean shirt brush my hair and clothes, tie my shoe-strings neatly and in fact adonize as I were going out—then all clean and comfortable I sit down to write.

To Reynolds he said :

I have given up Hyperion—there were too many Miltonic inversions in it—Miltonic verse can not be written but in an artful or rather artist's humour. I wish to give myself up to other sensations. English ought to be kept up. It may be interesting to you to pick out some lines from Hyperion and put a mark X to the false beauty proceeding from art, and one || to the true voice of feeling. Upon my soul 'twas imagination I cannot make the distinction—Every now & then there is a Miltonic intonation—But I cannot make the division properly.

In another place he said :

The *Paradise lost* though so fine in itself is a corruption of our Language—it should be kept as it is unique—a curiosity—a beautiful and grand Curiosity. The most remarkable Production of the world. A northern dialect accomodating itself to greek and latin inversions and intonations. The purest english I think—or what ought to be the purest—is Chatterton's . . . Chatterton's language is entirely northern. I prefer the native music of it to Milton's cut by feet. I have but lately stood on my guard against Milton. Life to him would be death to me.

He was at work on the revised 'Hyperion,' 'The Fall of Hyperion.' In the promised letter to Woodhouse he gave him two extracts from it. This fragment was his final serious work before illness gripped him and in one sense it is his greatest. He had experienced the amazing adventure of the *Divina Commedia* in the great original. Characteristically, since it touched him so nearly, he refers to it baldly and briefly in his letters, saying 'the reading of Dante is well worth the while.'

There is a debt in 'The Fall of Hyperion' to the Divine Comedy both in form and in individual passages. Dante's poem is a voyaging of the soul and so is the second Hyperion. It is an emanation of the innermost spirit of Keats, the *Purgatorio* of the suffering man ; a reading in the horn-book of the heart. Keats had up till now walked proudly wrapped in the poetic mantle ; he had not questioned his great destiny. Love had brought him a new humbleness of spirit, her greatest gift to the soul.

The exact purport of 'The Fall of Hyperion' is hard to grasp but a deep humility pervades it. He must have been reading with attention Canto XII of the *Purgatorio*. There on the side of the mount Dante is purged from pride. There are the same difficult steps in the climb upward as in the approach to the altar in 'Hyperion' and the same easy ascent when once the first painful effort has been made. In Dante's progress the last climb is made easy by an angel, clad in white as is Moneta, brushing his forehead with his wing. The subconscious memory of this angel may have led Keats to write that in ascending the steps to the altar he

mounted up  
As once fair angels on a ladder flew  
From the green turf to Heaven.

Some measure of the doubt as to his purpose, his meaning in life may have come from increasing debility and a natural despondency engendered by disappointed hopes and frustrated love but in the main it struck deeper. All humanity, believer and unbeliever, must come back at length to the Sermon on the Mount: 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.' Shakespeare, Socrates, Christ; they had all to experience this healing despair. It is a part of the allegory of life, a process in the making of the soul.

He made a final determination to write for the Press. He had played with the idea for many months but now his mind was made up. If his health had permitted, the humdrum pursuit of journalism would surely not have harmed him any more than Shakespeare was harmed by his life as a humble actor. His critical powers and the rich, racy quality of his prose would soon have lifted him out of the rut. He wrote to Brown, Reynolds and Dilke announcing his determination and asking Dilke to find him a cheap lodging in Westminster. The letter to Brown was a difficult one. This project had been talked over between them and Brown had dissuaded him. He wrote shyly, protesting his affection and gratitude to his friend and regretting that the money he had been forced to take from Brown had deprived him in the very prime of life, of pleasures which it was 'his duty to procure.' He said he could not 'live at Hampstead next winter—I like \*\*\*\*\* and I cannot help it.' He will 'fag on as others do,' applying to Hazlitt for information about markets. He had 'got into a habit of mind of looking towards' Brown 'as a help in all difficulties.' He must now stand on his own feet. 'If,' he told Brown, 'you have anything to gainsay, I shall be even as the deaf adder which stoppeth her ears.' To Dilke he had said:

Even if I am swept away like a Spider from a drawing room I am determined to spin—home spun any thing for sale. Yea I will traffic. Any thing but Mortgage my Brain to Blackwood. . . . You may say I want tact—that is easily acquired. You may be up to the slang of a cock pit in three battles. It is fortunate I have not before this been tempted to venture on the common.

The underlying bitterness comes to the surface in the phrase 'on the common.' For a woman to go 'on the common'



meant that she became the lowest type of prostitute, a street-walker. But there was a compensatory thought. He might be able to do something in a small way on behalf of 'The Liberal side of the Question' before his death.

Fearing that his good friend Brown might be made unhappy on his behalf he wrote him on the same day a second letter in which he said :

Imaginary grievances have always been more my torment than real ones. You know this well. Real ones will never have any other effect upon me than to stimulate me to get out of or avoid them. This is easily accounted for. Our imaginary woes are conjured up by our passions, and are fostered by passionate feeling : our real ones come of themselves, and are opposed by an abstract exertion of mind. Real grievances are displacers of passion. The imaginary nail a man down for a sufferer, as on a cross ; the real spur him up into an agent.

By 'imaginary woes' he did not mean troubles conceived in the mind and having no grounds in reality but the travail of the spirit. We can link up his use of the word 'imaginary' with the passage in the letter of March 13th from Teignmouth, in which he divided 'Ethereal things' under three heads : 'Things real—things semireal—and no things.' Under things real he put the existences of sun, moon and stars and under things semi-real 'Love, the Clouds &c which require a greeting of the Spirit to make them wholly exist.'

Though Keats was made in his short life to suffer much and was bound by the fineness of his nature to suffer more acutely than the common man he had the saving gift of humour. In his darkest hours humour would bubble up. Not only at this time did he play a practical joke on Brown, concocting a false note of complaint from his summer tenant at Wentworth Place, but he enjoyed a joke against himself. There was an old Major and a youngish wife living in the same house at Winchester. One day when Keats was 'reading as demurely as a Parish Clerk' in his room there was a rap on the door. On answering it he found no one there. This happened several times. 'This must be the Major's wife,' he said to himself, 'at all events I will see the truth.' So he went out, rapped at the Major's door and walked in, 'to the utter surprise and confusion of the Lady who was in

reality there.' After a difficult and confused explanation he made his escape. Later he found that 'a little girl in the house was the Rappee. 'If,' he commented, 'the Lady tells tits I shall put a very grave and moral face on the matter with the old Gentleman, and make his little Boy a present of a humming top.'

Keats's letters to Brown concerning his new plans had been directed to him at Mrs. Snook's at Bedhampton. In all he wrote four letters but received no reply. These letters were redirected to old Mr. Dilke's at Chichester but Brown did not arrive there until the fourth letter had been written, sent and redirected. It has been suggested that he had gone over to Ireland.

There are no secure grounds for asserting that at this period Brown did go to Ireland or that the supposed cause of his visit there was at this time in Ireland. The whole story of Abigail Donahue is a singular and puzzling one. By this Irish peasant woman Brown had a son, born some time in 1820 or early 1821. According to this son, Brown contracted with her a Roman Catholic marriage in Ireland. Although this union was, ten years before the Roman Catholic Emancipation Act, illegal, to the woman it would be a true marriage, performed as it was by a Catholic priest. Brown, on the other hand, must have known it was not binding. It would seem as if he wanted a child and chose deliberately for the mother of it a woman of strong healthy stock. In January, 1821, Abigail and the baby were living at Wentworth Place. Brown wrote to Keats: 'Abby is living with me again, but not in the same capacity,—she keeps to her own bed, & I keep myself continent. Any more nonsense of the former kind would put me in an awkward predicament with her. One child is very well. . . . In the mean time the child thrives gloriously . . .'

When the boy was two years old Brown took him abroad, giving as his reason that he feared he might be taken from him on the same grounds that Shelley lost his children by Harriett; because he was a free-thinker. Actually, of course, as the child was illegitimate he would be the property of the mother. The whole affair, however, is mysterious. Later Brown told his son that he had no reason to be ashamed of his birth. Abigail wanted to follow them and take a position

as servant near them, but this Brown would not allow. He seems to have had no affection for her. The child, Charles, whom he called affectionately 'Carlino' was very dear to him.

When Keats's letters did reach Brown he hastened to Winchester to try to dissuade his friend. He had, however, at length to agree that Keats was taking the only course open to him but he strenuously opposed his determination to live alone. Keats was adamant and by early October he was established at 25 College Street, Westminster.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### *His Illness (October 1819–August 1820)*

DILKE HAD KNOWN HOW TO CHOOSE A LODGING FOR A writer determined on a steady course of work. The ancient quiet houses of College Street, overlooking the Abbey gardens, were old then and could give Keats a memory of mellow cloistered Winchester.

But Keats found it impossible to work. The thought of Fanny Brawne now so much nearer to him fevered his blood. The detachment he had won for himself in Winchester fast melted away.

Severn visited him soon after his arrival in Town. He had expected to see Keats much improved in appearance after his long sojourn in the country but he was disappointed. Keats looked ill; but he seemed to be in high spirits and was full of his poetry. It was to Severn an evening of delight. He heard or read all the poems written since last June. 'Hyperion' came richly to him with such inevitability that lines from it haunted his memory to the end of his long life. He begged Keats to finish the poem, exclaiming that it might have been written by John Milton. This was the wrong thing to say. His friend immediately retorted, that was just the point; he did not want to put his name to a poem that might have been written by John Milton but to one that was unmistakably written by John Keats. Severn did not much care for 'Lamia' and regretted that his friend's mind 'seemed much more taken up by a rhymed story about a serpent-girl.' He promised, however, to reserve his judgment and to return another night to hear it read aloud. His arduous labours as miniaturist and aspiring painter in oils prevented him coming for a week or two and when he did come Keats was gone.

After a few days of futile attempts to work in Westminster

Keats had been irresistibly drawn to Hampstead. He spent a day of rich delight. He wrote to Fanny :

I am living to day in yesterday : I was in a complete fascination all day. I feel myself at your mercy. Write me ever so few lines and tell me you will never for ever be less kind to me than yesterday—. You dazzled me. There is nothing in the world so bright and delicate.

Brown had been with them during the evening and had concocted, to tease his friend, some story against him. 'I felt,' wrote Keats, 'it would be death to me if you had ever believed it—though against any one else I could muster up my obstinacy.' He protested that he lived only in her kindness. He put in a postscript such a wealth of love that over the long years and in cold print one can feel the yearning and the heartbreak of it : 'Ah hertè mine !'

Two days later he wrote again. He had been trying to copy out some verses but his mind was full of her and he could 'not proceed with any degree of content.'

Upon my Soul I can think of nothing else. The time is passed when I had power to advise and warn you against the unpromising morning of my Life. My love has made me selfish. I cannot exist without you. I am forgetful of every thing but seeing you again—my Life seems to stop there—I see no further. You have absorb'd me. I have a sensation at the present moment as though I was dissolving . . . I have no limit now to my love . . . 'Tis richer than an Argosy of Pearles. Do not threat me even in jest. I have been astonished that Men could die Martyrs for religion—I have shudder'd at it. I shudder no more—I could be martyr'd for my Religion—Love is my religion—I could die for that. I could die for you. My Creed is Love and you are its only tenet. You have ravish'd me away by a Power I cannot resist ; and yet I could resist till I saw you ; and even since I have seen you I have endeavoured often 'to reason against the reasons of my Love'. I can do that no more—the pain would be too great. My love is selfish. I cannot breathe without you.

After three days of futile endeavour he was up again at Hampstead to stay for a long week-end. He determined to live there once more. His prudence, his unselfish thought for her were all thrown to the winds. He gave himself up to love. He wrote to Fanny, saying :

I must impose chains upon myself. I shall be able to do nothing. I should like to cast the die for Love or death. I have no Patience with any thing else—if you ever intend to be cruel to me as you say in jest now but perhaps may sometimes be in earnest be so now—and I will—my mind is in a tremble, I cannot tell what I am writing.

By October 20th he was back living with Brown. He succeeded in chaining himself down to fairly steady work. The journalism he had determined on was not, however, so far as we know, pursued or even begun, unless 'The Cap and Bells' was written with a market in view. He told Taylor he had abandoned his hope of immediate gain from his poems and would publish nothing he had written though he hoped 'to publish a Poem before long and that I hope to make a fine one :

As the marvellous is the most enticing, and the surest guarantee of harmonious numbers I have been endeavouring to persuade myself to untether Fancy and let her manage for herself. I and myself cannot agree about this at all. Wonders are no wonders to me. I am more at home amongst Men and Women. I would rather read Chaucer than Ariosto.

He had been reading Ariosto in the autumn and found himself a little impatient. The poet's diffuseness worried him and the more so since he read with difficulty in Italian and could not manage more than six or eight stanzas at a time. Ariosto's marvels were too remote from the world of men and women. Keats was riper now for the great dramatic adventure. He was probably still at work on the *Stephen* fragment and he was reading in Holinshed with an eye on the Earl of Leicester's history. The poem he mentioned to Taylor may have been the revised 'Hyperion,' on which he was still at work, though it might have been an entirely new conception. At the end of his letter to Taylor he called it 'this Poem that is to be.'

If 'The Cap and Bells,' or, as he himself preferred to call it, 'The Jealousies,' were a piece of journalism it was a well-timed one. As a satire the main subject of it seems to be the unedifying matrimonial and love affairs of the Prince Regent. His relations with Princess Caroline were already occupying the public mind and, although feeling did not yet run high, London was taking sides. The Prince, with his

reckless extravagance and an eccentricity of conduct hovering on the borders of insanity, was unpopular. Economic conditions had improved slightly in 1817 and 1818 but they were now almost back to the miserable level of 1816. Gangs of roughs mobbed the Regent's coach and howled round Carlton House: the 'Adonis of fifty' felt it wiser to stay as much as possible within its walls or to retire to his world of exotic unreality at the Brighton Pavilion. As it was Brown who suggested the writing of a comic and satirical fairy-tale it is probable that the first intention of 'The Cap and Bells' was to produce an ephemeral work with a ready sale. The success of *Don Juan* referred to by Keats as 'Lord Byron's last flash poem' had probably led the thoughts of both men to a satirical work.

Without an exhaustive examination of contemporary journals, records and letters it is difficult to disentangle all the threads of 'The Cap and Bells,' the very intention of which is not fully revealed in the unfinished state of the poem. But from the point of view of an easy popularity it would appear as if Keats had weakened his appeal by an apparent confusion of theme. There are distinct hits at Lord Byron's matrimonial disaster as well as the Prince Regent's. Also the form of the poem does not look promising for a popular success. The machinery of fairies and magic is delightful enough but clouds the main purpose, if we have guessed that purpose aright. The wit is over-delicately barbed; its arrows would seem too light, too feathery for satire. There are also signs of weariness in the writing. Keats is for the first time using up old material in an uncreative manner. Bertha Pearl at Canterbury and the 'legend-leaved book' are too reminiscent of 'The Eve of St. Mark' and an affront to many in this flimsier setting. We know that Keats wrote at random with no design for either development or plot. This would in itself suggest a loss of power for it showed a relaxing of the discipline he had imposed on himself since he put *Endymion* behind him.

Brown probably realised the weaknesses of the poem but was only too glad to encourage Keats in work that could, without too great a strain on him, occupy him happily during a part of the day. He wrote it rapidly and easily, sitting with Brown who copied out the stanzas as they were finished.

Brown was worried about his friend. Under an outward serenity, an unnatural quietness of manner he knew him to be profoundly miserable. It was not long before he fell into a state of wretched apathy unable to write, unable to exercise his intellect in study. He felt himself to be a failure. His friends remonstrated and reasoned with him. He answered them patiently but the old affectionate vivacity of response was gone. He became for the first time careless of his health. He tried to support his failing spirits by a recourse to laudanum. When Brown by a fortunate accident discovered this he reproached him, saying that he of all people should realise the danger of even the few few drops he was taking: he secured from Keats a promise that he would never again touch the drug without his knowledge. 'Nothing,' said Brown, 'could induce him to break his word when given.'

If Keats could have brought himself to finish 'The Cap and Bells' and the satire of the finished poem had been made plain he might, when the old King died early in January, have caught the tide of popular interest. The question immediately arose in the public mind, was the Princess Caroline to become Queen? Feeling ran high. During the following months a host of pamphleteers and satirists arose on either side to reap a rich harvest. But worldly success was not for Keats: even in the matter of the play he had been unlucky. It had been accepted at Drury Lane Theatre and Brown was under the impression that it would be performed that season with Kean as Ludolph. This was all that the friends could desire. The play had been sent in under an assumed name. Presumably if the tragedy were successful the identity of Keats as part author would be triumphantly revealed to confound the Tory critics. Brown's plan had been to make his friend popular in spite of his detractors and with as short a delay as possible: but later he was informed that *Otho the Great* could not be performed until the spring or following autumn. He withdrew it and sent it to Covent Garden. Keats had, in the first flush of hopeful enthusiasm, rejected with scorn the idea of a performance at that theatre, saying that there was a wretched set of actors there. Swallowing his disappointment he now said bravely: 'T'would do one's heart good to see Macready



in Ludolph.' The tragedy was rejected. Brown had a suspicion that it had not even been read.

But if Keats had himself failed in a new venture, he could rejoice in the success of a friend. Severn had taken an important step forward in his project of abandoning miniature for historical painting; he had won the coveted Academy Gold Medal and with the additional honour of receiving the award after an interval of twelve years during which the Council had considered no entry to have reached the required standard. Keats went up to Town to see the picture, demanding from Severn a promise to return the compliment by going with him 'to see a Poem I have hung up for the Prize in the Lecture Room at the surry Institution.' The subject set by the Academy had been Spenser's 'Cave of Despair.' Keats ended his letter to Severn by 'You have best put me into your Cave of despair.'

The inroads of the disease on his mind are visible in his letters now. The old vivid interest in men and in things of the mind is gone. There is a new current of bitterness. The world is dull. He hates his fellow-men. This increasing bitterness of mood led to a certain brutality of utterance. The tone of his letters to George had sometimes been in part coarse after the manner of the age, but in his next letter, a short one written with visible effort, he put in a bawdy rime of Rice's although he must have known that 'little George' would see or want to see the letter. It was, to say the least, an error of taste. The rime in itself is ugly, but honest bawdry does not unduly disturb the modern mind. In a letter to Rice, however, there is a passage which I find peculiarly revolting and one which would not have been possible from Keats in health. He tells a story of a man whose wife, being pregnant, demands a bit of her husband's foot to eat and continued to demand more. He gives her a second piece thinking she may be carrying twins. When she asks for a third he 'stabbd her with the knife, cut her open and found three Children in her Belly two of them very comfortable with their mouths shut, the third with its eyes and mouth stark staring open.' The story may have originated with Brown who found enjoyment in a type of earthly fable he called a fairy-tale; but it is evident from his gusto in the telling, it had caught Keats's imagination. From a man who

had seen the travail of child-birth and had written so tenderly of woman's sufferings it cannot, even allowing for the brutal sexual attitude of the times, be accepted as normal.

Some critics attribute this increasing bitterness of mood to a growing jealousy and suspicion of Fanny Brawne, basing their assumption on some lines written down on the manuscript of 'The Cap and Bells.'

This living hand, now warm and capable  
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold  
And in the icy silence of the tomb,  
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights  
That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood  
So in my veins red life might stream again,  
And thou be conscience-calm'd—see here it is—  
I hold it towards you.

Others believe this to be merely a scrap of dialogue for a projected play, and I agree with them. The fragment is dramatic in form and feeling and if he had addressed it to Fanny he would not have written it on this manuscript for Brown, who was making the fair copy, to see. From two love-poems attributed to this autumn his main grief against Fanny would seem to have been his failing powers which he blamed entirely on to his absorbing love for her. In the 'Lines to Fanny' placed by Lord Houghton in October, he wrote :

How shall I do  
To get anew  
Those moulted feathers, and so mount once more  
Above, above  
The reach of fluttering Love,  
And make him cower lowly while I soar ?

In the sonnet 'To Fanny,' written later when he knew that love could not be resisted, he cries out to her to give him all, herself, her soul, or he will die, or living on, perhaps, her 'wretched thrall'

Forget, in the mist of idle misery,  
Life's purposes,—the palate of my mind  
Losing its gust, and my ambition blind !

There is one poem written at this time which is finer and happier reading than the 'Lines' or the sonnet 'To Fanny.' It is wrought poetry. It has less of immediate feeling poured

painfully into verse and is more truly 'emotion recollected in tranquillity.' It is to be prized, I feel, because we are apt to forget that Fanny brought him, besides anxious misery, brief hours of intense happiness :

The day is gone, and all its sweets are gone !  
 Sweet voice, sweet lips, soft hand, and softer breast,  
 Warm breath, light whisper, tender semi-tone,  
 Bright eyes, accomplish'd shape, and lang'rous waist !  
 Faded the flower and all its budded charms,  
 Faded the sight of beauty from my eyes,  
 Faded the shape of beauty from my arms,  
 Faded the voice, warmth, whiteness, paradise—  
 Vanish'd unseasonably at shut of eve,  
 When the dusk holiday—or holineight  
 Of fragrant-curtain'd love begins to weave  
 The woof of darkness thick, for hid delight ;  
 But as I've read love's missal through to-day,  
 He'll let me sleep, seeing I fast and pray.

To the agonizing consciousness of failing power and the pains of thwarted love was now added the ever-present worry of ways and means. There was no money coming in. George too was badly in need of money and receiving little from Abbey.

In early January, rendered desperate by poor circumstances, George came over to England to try to raise capital. He took back with him seven hundred pounds. After Keats's death Brown declared this money to have been all John's by right. George, he said, had only left behind him for his brother less than one hundred pounds, not sufficient even to cover John's debts. Dilke was staunch in George's defence. It is impossible to disentangle the Keats's financial affairs, but it would seem as if George were, though not business-like, a strictly honourable man. Though he was under no legal obligation to do so and was at the time, in Abbey's words, 'working like a Turk over in America,' he paid within a few years every shilling of John's debts.

There is no doubt that when George returned to America with the seven hundred pounds he left in Keats's mind resentment and some bitterness ; but it was a mind warped by sorrow and disease. He complained to Fanny Brawne that George had acted selfishly but he supposed that married life made a man selfish. His sense of honour would prevent

a word of discontent to George himself, for he had in his letters promised to help him to the fullest extent in his power. George on his side was unhappy. His brother had changed and the old intimacy, the mutual confidence was gone.

George told Dilke after Keats's death that not one penny of the sum he took with him was John's, but that he had led John to believe that some of it was his in order that he might the more easily help him with money when he could. The brothers had been used to consider their money as one common fund. His brother had been in such a depth of melancholy that he feared to tell him the true state of affairs ; that his own exchequer was depleted. Knowing Keats's lack of money-sense he might easily deceive him. That he did deceive him was unfortunate for it added one more grief and resentment to his load of misery. It would seem a stupid and clumsy thing to have done ; though probably the money was safer with George because of Keats's incurable habit of lending. We know from Brown that even after they had been in such a tight corner at Winchester, Keats could not forbear lending some of the money returned to him or loaned by Taylor. If George had been able, as he hoped in early June, to send John two hundred pounds, Brown's view of his conduct might not have been so jaundiced. At the time Brown himself had to admit that some of George's trouble in sending money was due to the difficulties of exchange in an undeveloped country. As it was, after Keats's death, Brown could admit nothing good of George ; he was dishonest, heartless and extravagant. Much of this prejudice he communicated to Fanny Brawne.

We do not know whether Keats told his brother of his engagement. There is no message to Fanny in George's letter to him on June 18th, but this is no evidence. They were a reticent family. Although he liked and valued her so highly, Keats himself had sent no messages to his future sister-in-law in his earlier letters to George. Also it is probable that George felt some resentment against Fanny Brawne. Even if John did not tell him directly of his engagement he must have been aware that his brother was deeply in love. Fanny told his sister in after years that George disliked her : he may have put down to her account much of his brother's unhappiness. She on the other hand

may have been cold to him, feeling that he had not treated John well.

Actually George seems to have obtained some money from an outside source; it was not, he said, 'all ours by right.' Perhaps Mr. Abbey advanced a sum.

Keats did not see a great deal of his brother; he was too unwell to accompany him on the visits he felt bound to pay. With George often absent and Brown, a jealous suspicious Brown, with them when he was at Wentworth Place, there could not have been many hours alone together for intimacy and mutual confidences. George himself was quiet and preoccupied. Keats had the impression that he was not well. His brother could not in the circumstances had been in full spirits. He had left many hundreds of miles away a girl-wife and the baby of whom he thought and talked often, after the manner of young fathers. There was constant anxiety about what he should be able to take back to them and how 'little George' was faring on the scanty allowance left behind. The journey alone had cost him one hundred and fifty pounds.

Keats wrote a letter to little George; a letter as cheerful as he was able to make it. He gave her the gossip and the nonsense she liked. He told her that he and her husband had dined with Taylor and then George had gone alone to see Haslam and his 'innamorata' at Deptford. Keats himself ought, though it was against his inclination, to visit her, for Haslam had been so kind to them. But, he said:

A Man is like a Magnet, he must have a repelling end—so how am I to see Haslams lady and family if I even went, for by the time I got to greenwich I should have repell'd them to Blackheath and by the time I got to Deptford, they would be on Shooters hill, when I came to shooters Hill, they would alight at Chatham and so on till I drove them into the Sea, which I think might be inditeable.

In this letter occurs the well-known passage about Rice, Reynolds and Richards, 'three witty people all distinct in their excellence' and the delightful 'Twang dillo dee' nonsense. His gloom shadows over parts of the letter. He said to her:

If you should have a Boy do not christen him John, and persuade George not to let his partiality for me come across. 'Tis a bad

name, and goes against a Man. If my name had been Edmund I should have been more fortunate.

George and Georgiana disregarded this and named their fifth child, born in 1827, John. I do not know whether he throve in circumstances, but he probably did in health. He lived to be ninety, dying in 1917.

George left London for Liverpool on January 28th, never to see his brother again. He had not even the consolation of receiving the smallest token of his brother: not a single book or manuscript or personal belonging was sent him after Keats's death. The only thing remaining to him, except John's letters which he treasured, was a book of transcripts of poems largely copied by himself and taken back on this voyage.

By the middle of January Keats had made up his mind to go out of London. He must attempt to work again and he hoped it might again be possible away from Fanny. He stayed on, however, in Hampstead until the end of the month, and then on February 3rd he was taken seriously ill.

There had been a spell of cold, snowy weather while George was in England, but now the thaw set in. Keats went to Town and, in that new carelessness of health, returned at night on top of the coach without a greatcoat. He was at first chilled to the bone, but when he came into Wentworth Place at eleven o'clock he was in a high fever, so flushed and nervous that he appeared drunk. Brown knew that he could not be drunk 'for such a state in him was impossible.' He insisted on him going at once to bed. As he was getting into bed, a cold bed, for neither seem to have thought of the warming pan, he coughed slightly. He said to Brown who had just entered the room: "That is blood from my mouth." Brown went nearer and saw in the gloom that he was looking down closely at the sheet.

"Bring me the candle, Brown, and let me see this blood."

All his excitement, his feverish intoxication were gone now. He was calm. In the circle of light from the candle Brown saw upon the bed a single drop of blood. Keats looked steadily at it. When at length he turned his face towards Brown and spoke, his voice was quiet and calm.

"I know the colour of that blood. It's arterial blood.

I cannot be deceived in that colour. That drop of blood is my death-warrant. I must die."

Brown ran for a surgeon and, after the astonishing fashion of the time, he was bled. Brown remained by his bedside until five in the morning when he fell into a quiet sleep.

When the blood came up into his mouth, half-suffocating him, he thought of his love. As he lay for those five hours awake and still, in the shadows, he thought of her. During the first days of illness the thought of Fanny obsessed him in every waking hour.

The next day he wrote to her :

Dearest Fanny, I shall send this the moment you return. They say I must remain confined to this room for some time. The consciousness that you love me will make a pleasant prison of the house next to yours. You must come and see me frequently : this evening, without fail—when you must not mind about my speaking in a low tone for I am ordered to do so though I *can* speak out.

It is probable that the absence of Fanny from home was a fiction on Brown's part to keep him quiet ; a fiction kindly meant but ineffective. Brown was not, he said himself, a good liar. In a postscript Keats said he had ' been looking for the stage the whole afternoon.' This might mean that he was from time to time raising himself on his elbow to look out of the window, over the fields, in the hope of seeing the London coach rolling up towards the Bird in Hand in the High Street and, a few minutes later, a small familiar figure coming across to Wentworth Place. This movement would have damaged the ruptured lung. It is essential that a hæmorrhage patient should lie perfectly still on his back for some days.

Evidently he began to suspect that he was being fobbed off with a tale. Why did she not come to see him ? Then Brown said to him that perhaps her mother was out and she must wait until she returned. At length he extorted a confession that she had been there all the time. He ended his postscript with : ' Had I known this I could not have remain'd so silent all day.'

There were regular visits from Fanny and an interchange of notes. She sent him always a written good-night. His notes were cheerful and, on the whole, optimistic about

himself. She was not to know of his inward conviction that he must die. His native humour soon bubbled up again. Telling her how the thought of her had obsessed him, he added: 'Tis true that since the first two or three days other subjects have entered my head.'

His sister was not forgotten. He wrote to her on the 7th, minimising his illness, but saying, in case worse news must be sent: 'If I should be long confined I shall write to Mr. Abbey to ask permission for you to visit me.' By the 9th he had been brought down from his back bedroom and a bed made up for him in the front parlour. He wrote to Fanny Keats:

How much more comfortable than a dull room up stairs, where one gets tired of the pattern of the bed curtains. Besides I see all that passes—for instance now, this morning, if I had been in my own room I should not have seen the coals brought in. On Sunday between the hours of twelve and one I descried a Pot boy. I conjectured it might be the one o'Clock beer—

There was open Heath before Wentworth Place then with the exception of two half-built houses which 'seemed dying of old age before they were brought up.' One of these was the present Eton Lodge. The Heath was then a village common used for grazing and drying clothes, for gathering sticks for humble fires. Keats gave his sister a vivid description of what he saw there to amuse a half-hour in her dull life with the Abbess:

Old women with bobbins and red cloaks and unassuming bonnets I see creeping about the heath. Gipseys after hare skins and silver spoons. Then goes by a fellow with a wooden clock under his arm that strikes a hundred and more. Then comes the old french emigrant, (who has been very well to do in France) with his hands joined behind on his hips, and his face full of political schemes. . . . As for those fellows the Brickmakers they are always passing to and fro. I mus'n't forget the two old maiden Ladies in well walk who have a Lap dog between them that they are very anxious about. It is a corpulent Little Beast whom it is necessary to coax along with an ivory-tipp'd cane. Carlo our Neighbour Mr<sup>s</sup> Brawne's dog and it meet sometimes. Lappy thinks Carlo a devil of a fellow and so do his Mistresses. Well they may—he would sweep 'em all down at a run; all for the Joke of it.

He was vexed to hear from Fanny Keats a few days later that she was not allowed enough pocket-money by Abbey.



She was in her seventeenth year now. He told her that Abbey had also treated himself and George badly by withholding money from them and compelling George to take a long and costly journey to England in order to exact it. He may have had fresh information about the conduct of their affairs by Abbey, but otherwise this does not square with his earlier statement that he knew that Abbey was doing his best; that it was lawyers and litigation past and to come that was ruining them. The irritable suspiciousness natural to the mind of the consumptive may have been increased by Abbey's neglect of himself. Brown wrote twice during Keats's illness but Abbey did not reply. He had not inquired how Keats had been living all these months nor seemed to take the slightest interest in him. After the hat-making suggestion he had certainly mentioned in December the possibility of a tea-brokerage for him. Keats thought this over: if he did not want to keep it himself he could hand it over to George. Anyhow it would mean easy profit without much work. He had again approached Abbey on the subject and the changeable old man put him off, representing and enlarging on the onerous duties the brokerage would entail. 'His mind,' Keats commented, 'takes odd turns.'

In spite of being given, according to the treatment of the day, so small a quantity of food that 'a mouse would starve on it' by the 11th, eight days after the attack, he was able to walk for a quarter of an hour in the garden. He had good care and attention from his friends. He had 'so many presents of jam and jellies,' he told his sister, 'that they would reach side by side the length of the sideboard.' But his nervousness increased. The doctor felt obliged to limit Fanny's visits as they excited him beyond his strength. The marvel is that his powerful and restless mind was not more affected. Forbidden to write or to read poetry, he was shut in a hot room and half-starved on a vegetable diet. Knowing the inordinate appetites of consumptives and the large allowance of food, and especially flesh foods, now given them this would seem wanton cruelty; but it was the orthodox treatment. There is a pathetic letter in the Keats Museum, written by Tom to Dilke in the summer of 1818, complaining that invalids 'are supposed to have delicate stomachs; for my part I should like a slice of underdone surloin.'

He had now, except for occasional visits and the precious notes, to try to find satisfaction in glimpses of his love through the window. Fanny kept to the house and garden until he wrote to her : ' Let me not longer detain you from going to Town—there may be no end to this imprisoning of you.' He felt himself obliged to suggest again that he should free her from their engagement. It is no wonder that he wrote : ' I wish I had even a little hope.'

But she would not be freed. She had been very tender towards him since his attack. Perhaps, girl-like, she had previously taken his love for granted but now, with the thought of the recent death of Tom from the same disease, she must have realised that she might lose him. Soon after his attack she wrote, for she was too shy to say it to him, that she hoped he would not think her cold. Rendered, perhaps, by anxiety and confinement a little nervous herself, she suggested that he might wish to forget her. He replied : My dearest Girl, how could it ever have been my wish to forget you ? how could I have said such a thing ? The utmost stretch my mind has been capable of was to endeavour to forget you for your own sake seeing what a chance there was of my remaining in a precarious state of health. I would have borne it as I would bear death if fate was in that humour : but I should as soon think of choosing to die as to part from you.

After he had received her refusal to give him up he had written :

My greatest torment since I have known you has been a fear of you being a little inclined to the Cressid ; but that suspicion I dismiss utterly and remain happy in the surety of your Love, which I assure you is as much a wonder to me as a delight.

The weather was not kind. With the wind sighing round the house and rain streaming against the windows he lay brooding on his love. The doctor took advantage of the weather to try to give him hope ; he would be better when the sun began to shine again. He thought with longing of the spring, the tender ' greening ' when

early budders are just new,  
And run in mazes of the youngest hue  
About old forests ; while the willow trails  
Its delicate amber ; and the dairy pails  
Bring home increase of milk.

He wrote to Rice :

I shall follow your example in looking to the future good rather than brooding upon present ill. I have not been so worn with lengthen'd illnesses as you have therefore cannot answer you on your own ground with respect to those haunting and deformed thoughts and feelings you speak of. When I have been or supposed myself in health I have had my share of them, especially within this last year. I may say that for 6 Months before I was taken ill I had not passed a tranquil day. Either that gloom overspread me or I was suffering under some passionate feeling, or if I turn'd to versify that acerbated the poison of either sensation.

The Beauties of Nature had lost their power over me. How astonishingly (here I must premise that illness as far as I can judge in so short a time has relieved my Mind of a load of deceptive thoughts and images and makes me perceive things in a truer light)—How astonishingly does the chance of leaving the world impress a sense of its natural beauties on us. Like poor Falstaff, though I do not babble, I think of green fields. I muse with the greatest affection on every flower I have known from my infancy—their shapes and colours are as new to me as if I had just created them with a superhuman fancy. It is because they are connected with the most thoughtless and happiest moment of our Lives. I have seen foreign flowers in hothouses of the most beautiful nature, but I do not care a straw for them. The simple flowers of our spring are what I want to see again.

It would seem as if Rice in his wisdom had guessed at 'the deformed thoughts and feelings' behind the revolting story of the man and his wife in Keats's last letter to him; and that he had explained to himself such an uncharacteristic utterance by a mention in his letter to Keats of the effect of long and frequent illnesses in his own case. Perhaps Keats was in a sense reassuring his friend by his revelation of a more normal outlook since the attack.

To Fanny he wrote of how he had pondered during long wakeful nights on himself and on fame :

"If I should die," said I to myself, "I have left no immortal work behind me—nothing to make my friends proud of my memory—but I have lov'd the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remember'd." Thoughts like these came very feebly whilst I was in health and every pulse beat for you—now you divide with this (may I say it?) "last infirmity of noble minds" all my reflection.

After three weeks of confinement he felt himself to be progressing very little. He said so frankly to his love. But the spring was near now :

Do you hear the Thrush singing over the field? I think it is a sign of mild weather—so much the better for me . . . That Thrush is a fine fellow. I hope he was fortunate in his choice this year.

He asked her not to return any more of his books. 'I have great pleasure in the thought of you looking on them.' It was one of his joys in love to help her to share his tastes in reading. Under his guidance her young mind was developing. She had once been lured by the fashionable syren voice of the sophist Byron but now she could admit him to be not among the finer spirits.

In his dull confinement and enforced seclusion from the world of letters a pretty compliment came his way and gave him pleasure. B. W. Procter (Barry Cornwall) had called on him and had afterwards sent him a copy of his *Marcian Colonna* with a note in a humble strain as from a lesser to a great man. He asked Keats to send him an early copy of his next work with an inscription. This call in 1820 is the only recorded instance of a meeting between 'Barry Cornwall' and Keats. It seems, however, unlikely that it was the first. The two young men were, after all, members of the same literary circle : also the description of Keats given by Procter does not suggest an ill man. Procter was charmed with 'his bright and open countenance, his ability in discussion and simplicity of bearing.' There are in addition two suggestions of an early acquaintance with Procter in a holograph of the sonnet 'On the Grasshopper and Cricket' with a note 'This is Keats's handwriting B.W.P.' and a copy of the *Poems*, 1817, presented by Keats to Procter on December 30th, 1818.

On sending his letter with the presentation copy after the visit Procter wrote in a postscript 'I wish you would set me the example of leaving off the word 'Sir.' ' A few days later he sent Keats his *Dramatic Scenes* and *A Sicilian Story*, a version of the Boccaccian tale out of which Keats himself had made 'Isabella or the Pot of Basil.' Rather disappointingly, in writing to Reynolds of the incident, Keats did not

criticise *A Sicilian Story* but he does say with reference to the *Dramatic Scenes* :

I confess they tease me—they are composed of Amiability—the Seasons, the Leaves, the Moon &c. upon which he rings (according to Hunt's expression) triple bob majors. However that is nothing—I think he likes poetry for its own sake, not his.

Surely a sound criticism of 'Barry Cornwall's' pretty pipings; pipings that emulate, perhaps from a noble consciousness of the worth of poetry, the strains of an heroic trumpet. Hunt's 'triple bob majors' must have been derived from some lines of 'Barry Cornwall's' in 'Gyges' and refer to his deliberate use of the *ottava rima* in lighter verse after the manner of Byron :

The old 'ottava rima,' (quite a pleasure,  
To poets who can make their triplets chime  
Smoothly . . .

Keats was now slightly better and sleeping tolerably well. For a while his notes to Fanny were more cheerful and there are touches of the old humour. He had been amusing himself with 'two volumes of Letters written between Rousseau and two Ladies in the perplexed strain of mingled finesse and sentiment in which the Ladies and gentlemen of those days were so clever.' It was prevalent still, he said, 'among Ladies of this Country who live in a state of reasoning romance.' (A lady of this melting type was, a decade later, observed with amusement by the young Charles Dickens and satirised in his 'Julia Mills.') Keats wondered

What would Rousseau have said at seeing our little correspondence! What would his Ladies have said! I don't care much—I would sooner have Shakspeare's opinion about the matter. The common gossiping of washerwomen must be less disgusting than the continual and eternal fence and attack of Rousseau and these sublime Petticoats.

His innate sense of style never deserted him even in his darkest hours. About this time he coined a word worthy of adoption into our language. While enjoying some black currant jelly he

made a little mark on one of the Pages of Brown's Ben Jonson, the very best book he has. I have lick'd it but it remains very purple—I did not know whether to say purple or blue . . . purple

. . . may be an excellent name for a colour made up of those two, and would suit well to start next spring.

Fanny gave him a ring on which their joint names were engraved. He wrote :

The power of your benediction is of not so weak a nature as to pass from the ring in four and twenty hours—it is like a sacred Chalice once consecrated and ever consecrate. I shall kiss your name and mine where your Lips have been—Lips ! why should a poor prisoner as I am talk about such things. Thank God, though I hold them the dearest pleasures in the universe, I have a consolation independent of them in the certainty of your affection. I could write a song in the style of Tom Moore's Pathetic about Memory if that would be any relief to me. No 'twould not. I will be as obdurate as a Robin. I will not sing in a cage.

In a letter expressing once more his utter devotion to her he wrote what is sweet for a woman to hear, though dearer still after years of marriage : ' You are always new.'

By March 4th he was decidedly better but still weak from being kept on a small amount of 'pseudo-victuals.' This process of semi-starvation affected his heart. On March 6th and 8th he was attacked by violent palpitations. Probably now the local surgeon, or Dr. Darling if he were already attending him, brought Dr. Robert Bree in consultation. Dr. Bree was a specialist on respiratory disorders and under the patronage of the Duke of Sussex, son of George III, whom he attended for asthma. He gave a good hope of recovery, saying that 'there was no pulmonary affection and no organic defect whatever.' Dr. Bree was a man of seventy and perhaps too old to take to that newfangled invention, the stethoscope ; if indeed the stethoscope had yet reached him for it was only invented in Paris in the previous year. But he was not the first or the last doctor to diagnose wrongly in Keats's case.

In two days' time Keats was up again and able to walk in the garden ; although so nervous that he could not bear the smallest excitement.

Brown had all this time been nursing him devotedly. In the first dark hours of illness he sat by his bed far into the night. He was on the whole, with his robust health, good spirits and general tact, a good attendant for Keats. But in

Brown the coarse element in his nature at times betrayed him. Characteristically he admired Hogarth and cherished his prints. He was peculiarly deft with his hands. He could write the Pater Noster on a scrap of paper the size of his little finger-nail. He drew well and during the long hours of watching he passed the time by making accurate and careful sepia drawings of heads from the prints, many being from that ghastly scene in a madhouse, No. 8 in the series 'The Rake's Progress.' These drawings, on small cards, are now exhibited in the Keats Memorial House. One day he brought home in triumph Hogarth's 'Credulity, Superstition and Fanaticism,' a picture the subject of which must have had an unusually strong appeal to his free-thinking mind. He showed it with pride to Keats. Hogarth is strong and even rank meat to many modern stomachs and to a sick man, even though he were a Georgian, he must have been peculiarly nauseous. The new picture gave Keats a sleepless night.

Brown knew well enough how intensely Keats loved Fanny but in his relations with the lovers he was unable to tread delicately enough near a man whose nerves were in a painfully morbid condition. Embarrassed by emanations of young love Brown joked too heavily and a little stupidly with Fanny. Confinement to the house and anxiety had affected the girl's health and perhaps made her at times a little hysterical so that she laughed rather too loudly and unwisely, made the more nervous by the dark, pained eyes of her lover. A man deeply in love is naturally jealous of every man under fifty and the poor diseased mind enlarged upon every word they uttered and brooded over it. This was probably the starting-off point for the new access of jealous suspicion of Fanny Brawne. He had professed himself secure in her affection, he had told her she must go out again and take up in some measure her old life but now he asked himself, what did she do and whom did she meet? When she went to Town was it only to see Mrs. Dilke? Fanny Brawne must have needed at this time infinite patience and all the support her love for him could give her. Brown too must have needed patience. It is not likely that Keats's generosity of temper or his gratitude to Brown could always restrain him from indulgence in covertly hostile moods or in that irritability which is one of the most distressing symptoms of phthisis. Brown must have noticed

that Fanny never now visited her lover when he was at home. Keats had asked her not to.

By March 25th Keats was well enough to go up to Town to the private view of Haydon's 'Christ entering Jerusalem,' finished at last. The grandiose painter had, on borrowed money, hired the great Egyptian Hall in which to exhibit it. He sent out invitations to the rank and fashion of the day. Some distinguished and exalted people had already viewed the picture in the studio and had been sufficiently impressed to speak well of it to others. The hall was soon crowded with, to use Haydon's own words, 'the ministers and their ladies, all the foreign ambassadors, all the bishops, all the beauties in high life . . . all the geniuses in town, and everybody of any note.' This catalogue was characteristically all-embracing but certainly many distinguished people did come to quiz the picture and went away profoundly impressed.

Keats and Hazlitt sat together in a corner happy in their friend's triumph. It is to be hoped that Keats was there to enjoy one incident which Haydon tells in his usual superb manner :

The Christ's head startled people. It was not the traditional head ; not the type ; not orthodox. Everybody seemed afraid, when in walked, with all the dignity of her majestic presence, Mrs. Siddons, like a Ceres or a Juno. The whole room remained dead silent, and allowed her to think. After a few minutes Sir George Beaumont, who was extremely anxious, said in a very delicate manner : " How do you like the Christ ? " Everybody listened for her reply. After a moment, in a deep, loud, tragic tone she said : " It is completely successful." I was then presented with all the ceremonies of a levee, and she invited me to her house in an awful tone, and expressed her high admiration of the way in which I had so variously modified the same expression. " The paleness of your Christ," said she, " gives it a supernatural look."

The approval of the great woman was enough. Fashion might safely admire the picture and the middle classes could follow their lead. The public were admitted at a charge and money rolled in. Haydon had to pay his debts, many of which were pressed by lawyer's letters. He took, in the exhibition of this picture in London, Edinburgh and Glasgow,



three thousand pounds. Let us hope that he paid back what he owed to John Keats.

Approval was not universal. Many who understood painting saw the weaknesses of the picture and especially in the Christ's head with which Haydon himself was secretly dissatisfied. He had fumbled over it, repainting it at least seven times. Perhaps there was for the failure of the Christ face a psychological cause arising out of Haydon's inordinate self-love; it bears a remarkable resemblance to himself. Indeed, in one version he did take himself as model. James Northcote, the Academician, an acid relict of the past century, came and spoke his mind: "Mr. Haydon, the ass is the Saviour of your picture." This remark may have had a double edge to it. Charles and Thomas Landseer were pupils of Haydon's. Their more famous brother Edwin had himself received in 1816 some instruction from him: there was a rumour that he had been 'permitted to paint in this animal.' Haydon does not himself mention Northcote's comment in his journal; nor does he mention the admiration aroused by the painting of the ass.

At the beginning of April the tenor of Keats's invalid life at Hampstead was broken by a small but pleasurable interest, a link with the little sister he had not been able to see for so many weeks. Fanny Keats had a spaniel she was no longer able to keep and she sent him to her brother. As Keats did not, in his letter to his sister, mention where he had placed the dog in Hampstead, we might presume that he came temporarily under the care of Fanny Brawne. The reticence with regard to her, almost amounting to a mania, precluded him from mentioning Fanny even to his sister. 'The Dog,' he wrote, 'is being attended to like a Prince.' Later we hear of the spaniel going to Mrs. Dilke's brother, possibly Mr. Snook at Bedhampton.

Brown was now thinking of his long summer vacation. He decided again to walk in the Highlands. He has been blamed for leaving Keats at this time, for not breaking through his habit of letting his house; but after all he had already done much for Keats. After weeks of devoted nursing he deserved a change. This change he could not afford without letting his house. He could leave his friend with a clear conscience; the doctor had said there was now nothing the matter with

Keats beyond 'nervous irritability and a general weakness of the whole system,' the result of the worries and anxiety of the past years and 'too great excitement of poetry.' Apparently he had prescribed a study of Geometry to his patient! Keats wrote to his sister: 'They tell me I must study lines and tangents and squares and circles to put a little Ballast into my mind.' So sure was the doctor of recovery that he advised Keats to go north with Brown. Fortunately both Brown and Keats were wiser than he: it was agreed, however, that Keats should accompany his friend up to Scotland on the smack, returning alone, for the benefit of the sea air.

Brown's generosity to Keats did not end with the care and money he had already so freely given him; he left him fifty pounds on which to live in his absence. This money he was forced to borrow at interest from a friend.

Although Keats was by now leading a fairly normal life, the journey over to Walthamstow was not to be ventured upon. He longed to see his sister before he sailed. In regard to the illness of the two brothers it is difficult not to call Mr. and Mrs. Abbey a heartless pair.

Keats did not, however, go farther than Gravesend. Possibly he had overestimated his strength. The idea of a voyage beneficial to health persisted: he thought again of the old plan of going on board an Indiaman or, alternatively, of a voyage to South America. An anonymous newspaper correspondent, writing to the *Morning Chronicle* a few months after his death, stated that Keats 'once said, that if he should live a few years, he would go over to South America, and write a Poem on Liberty.' The desire for the freedom of man, a care for the Liberal question, never left him although he seldom wrote of it.

It was imperative to seek, as well as health, a livelihood. He could not continue to live on Brown. In the meantime he retired to Kentish Town and made efforts to proceed with 'The Cap and Bells.' He was living near Hunt and spending much of his time with him. Perhaps the growing dislike and suspicion of Hunt had been swept away, together with other morbid thoughts and feelings, in the attack. Brown certainly said he was always happy in Hunt's company. He lodged in Wesleyan Terrace, then a trim row in one of

the prettiest villages around London. He wrote from there to Fanny Brawne :

I endeavoured to make myself as patient as possible. Hunt amuses me very kindly—besides I have your ring on my finger and your flowers on the table. I shall not expect to see you yet because it would be so much pain to part with you again. When the Books you want come you shall have them. I am very well this afternoon. My dearest . . .

He spent a quiet week marking the most beautiful passages in Spenser for her, 'comforting myself in being somehow occupied to give you however small a pleasure.' On May 15th he wrote cheerfully to Brown that he was 'well enough to extract much more pleasure than pain out of the summer' even though he 'should get no better.' It is not probable that Keats himself was ever deceived about his condition. Hunt and Brown both mention that during his illness he would look at his hands, which were faded and swollen in the veins, and remark that they were the hands of an old man. He knew how brief would be the summer of his life.

Soon he wrote the first of his terrible letters to Fanny. With the progress of the disease, his growing irritable suspicions playing around her bright, delicate figure in absence, he wrought himself up into a raging jealousy. He was haunted by a vision of her in a shepherdess dress, perhaps a fancy costume worn at one of the hated Balls in the Long Room in Well Walk. In health he had said that he would not wish to deny her a single pleasure ; now he demanded a complete sacrifice of herself. 'You must be mine to die upon the rack if I want you.' The element of cruelty in all great love grew fungus-like and overspread the generosity of his nature.

I shall not quote much from these letters. They were not written by John Keats but by the pitiful diseased and tormented creature into which a relentless fate transformed him. Everyone of us who has had experience of this dreadful disease knows how the sweetest nature can be warped and destroyed.

It was probably at this time that he scored anew, under-scored and side-marked *Troilus and Cressida* in his folio Shakespeare. His identification of Fanny with Cressida was

an insult that only a loving and understanding girl could brook. This fact alone should long ago have confounded the doubters in Fanny's love. As far back as October, 1818, when he had probably not met Fanny, he wrote in sad prophecy to his brother: 'I throw my whole being into Troilus,' and repeating those lines "I wander, like a lost Soul upon the stygian Banks staying for waftage." He had in the early day of hope when, alone on his journey to the Isle of Wight, he had unboxed a Shakespeare, cried 'Here's my comfort!' Could he in his loneliness now, a bitter loneliness of heart, find relief in the abiding beauty of his master's lines:

I stalke about her doore  
Like a strange soule upon the Stigian bankes  
Staying for waftage,

In sorrow and near to death perhaps the agony of the lines outweighed their beauty.

The weather was unkind. In his walks abroad he was driven by sudden showers from shelter to shelter. His one worldly interest was the new book to be published in July. It would, he told Brown, come out 'with very low hopes, though not low spirits, on my part.'

But he was not now confined between four monotonous walls and kept on a low diet. He was able to control his nervousness and appear tolerably cheerful in company. There was, however, one outbreak of irritability which he acknowledged with regret in a letter to Brown. The name of the mutual friend to whom he was uncivil was suppressed by Brown but it would appear to have been Dilke. In his growing discontent with the circle in which he moved he had long been rather impatient in Dilke's society; both the man's dogmatic political opinions and his absurd devotion to his boy had annoyed him. There was a fresh cause of irritation against the Dilkes; Fanny's disliked and suspected visits to Town were to see Mrs. Dilke. He said to Brown that he could go and 'accommodate matters' but what was the use? He was too weary of the world. They were more happy and comfortable than he, therefore why should he trouble himself about it?

Wordsworth was in Town and he had recently spent an

evening at Monkhouse's with Wordsworth, Lamb and Talfourd. He was invited by another friend to sup with Wordsworth, Southey, Lamb and Haydon but he felt his health to be improving slowly and would not risk being out at night. He visited the Surrey Institution to see a collection of English portraits. His old humour bubbled up in describing this to Brown :

There is James the First, whose appearance would disgrace a "Society for the Suppression of Women"; so very squalid and subdued to nothing he looks.

Despite his apparent improvement in health he had not been well enough to start again on 'The Cap and Bells.' The savage letters to Fanny continued. In red-hot imagination he saw her light-heartedly dancing and flirting. 'I appeal to you,' he cried, 'by the blood of the Christ you believe in: Do not write to me if you have done anything this month which it would have pained me to have seen.' The desperate state of his mind could not have been improved by a letter from George telling of misfortune and sorrow. His little girl had been 'so ill as to approach the Grave dragging our dear George after her.' George is here, of course, 'little George' or Georgiana. He had not prospered in his affairs though he tried to make the best of things. He was unable to send yet the two hundred pounds he had hoped to give his brother. To add to Keats's worries he received an urgent summons from Fanny Keats to come to Walthamstow. We do not know the cause; perhaps she had broken into open rebellion against the petty tyranny of the Abbeyes.

The agitation he must have felt on her behalf could not have made him the fitter for the long coach journey. He started out at once but was soon brought to a halt by a spitting of blood. He returned to the house. In the evening he went round to Leigh Hunt. Mrs. Gisborne, the friend of Shelley, was taking tea there. She wondered if the quiet, pale young man were the author of *Endymion* 'but on observing his countenance and his eyes I persuaded myself he was the very person.' Haydon tells us that Keats was the only man he had ever met 'who seemed and looked conscious of a high calling, except Wordsworth.' Over the tea-cups the talk turned, as it had a way of doing at Hunt's, on music and

especially on Italian and English singing. Mrs. Gisborne said that 'Farinelli had the art of taking breath imperceptibly, while he continued to hold one single note, alternately swelling out and diminishing the power of his voice like waves.' Keats who had spoken very little and in such a low voice that it was difficult to catch what he said, now observed that this must be as painful to the hearer as watching a diver descend into the hidden depths of the sea and thinking that he might never rise again. Mrs. Gisborne recorded this in her journal. She knew nothing of the hæmorrhage that day, merely writing down that Keats 'had lately been ill.' It seems probable that the Hunts did not know of it either. When Keats returned home he had another attack.

We do not know what doctor was called in. It seems likely that it was Dr. William Lambe who was living in Kentish Town near the Hunts. He had attended Hunt and Shelley and was later a friend of the Leigh Hunts. Very soon we find Keats under the care of Dr. Darling; but in the meantime he seems to have been attended, or at least examined by Dr. Lambe.

Dr. William Lambe was a well-known consultant on constitutional diseases on which he had written a book. He was a generous man and would excuse or minimise fees in cases of poverty. He was regarded as something of an eccentric from his strong advocacy of vegetarianism. This view of him was probably heightened by the physical accident of his being that freak of nature, an albino. It was his belief in vegetarianism which probably brought Shelley to him as patient.

When Dr. Lambe retired into Herefordshire he took with him his case-papers. At some time these were stowed away in a leaking attic and forgotten. When they were later searched for by his great-grandson, Mr. H. Saxe Wyndham, they were so injured by damp as to be either illegible or entirely destroyed. From them we might have gathered valuable information about the last days in England of Keats and Shelley.

Dr. Lambe was not a general practitioner. One must suppose that he handed the case over, or back to Darling. Dr. Darling lived in Town, in Russell Square, so he could hardly have been called in at the outset.

The treatment followed the old disastrous way of 'copious bleedings and active medicines.' Keats must have been a strong man to survive it so long. He could not in this condition remain in lodgings, and Hunt decided that he must be moved to Mortimer Terrace. Hunt was himself unwell with 'a bilious fever' and Mrs. Hunt lived a harassed life coping incompetently on inadequate means with a growing family; but this large-hearted couple could always find room for the sick and suffering.

Towards the end of June a hot spell of weather set in. He was in no fit state now to enjoy the heat; it made him ill. He spat blood for several days. Dr. Darling was now in attendance. He and Dr. Lambe both agreed that his only chance of life was to winter in Italy.

The hot weather was the cause of one pleasant minor incident. Hunt set about writing an article for the *Indicator* to be called 'A Now, Descriptive of a Hot Day.' Keats helped him and supplied 'one or two passages.' It has become almost a parlour-game for Keatsians to try to pick out the passages contributed by Keats. One, a reference to an apothecary's apprentice who thinks yearningly of the pond he used to bathe in at school, seems fairly obvious, but the other or others can be selected according to taste or inner conviction. This article is reprinted in H. Buxton Forman's *Complete Works*.

In the same number of the *Indicator* Hunt published the Dream sonnet, 'As Hermes once took to his feathers light.' He had already printed 'La Belle Dame sans Merci,' though unfortunately in the altered and weakened version. Both poems were undersigned 'Caviar.' Since the attacks on *Endymion* Keats had not used his own name in periodicals. Elsewhere he had employed the sign of a dagger thrusting downwards.

Keats did not remain long in bed. Downstairs in the midst of the untidy, crowded household there must have been many nerve-racking moments; even in comparative health, company, and especially noisy child-life, had of late worried him. But this was better than solitude: he was among friends and there was the refuge of Hunt's writing-room and the cheer of his buoyant bright society.

In the midst of this home life, familiar to him of old in

the happy early days in the Vale of Health, the image of Fanny haunted him. He saw her in every known detail of her life at Wentworth Place. 'I see,' he wrote, 'every thing over again eternally that I ever have seen.' Miserably enough, jealous suspicion was now extended to his friends :

My friends have behaved well to me in every instance but one, and there they have become tattlers, and inquisitors into my conduct : spying upon a secret I would rather die than share it with any body's confidence. For this I cannot wish them well, I care not to see any of them again. If I am the Theme, I will not be the Friend of idle Gossips. Good gods what a shame it is our Loves should be so put into the microscope of a Coterie.

In his despair he could no longer believe in a life to come. He wrote to Fanny :

I long to believe in immortality. I shall never be able to bid you an entire farewell. If I am destined to be happy with you here—how short is the longest Life. I wish to believe in immortality—wish to live with you for ever.

He added a tender apology for his unkindness to her :

If I have been cruel and unjust I swear my love has ever been greater than my cruelty which lasts but a minute whereas my Love come what will shall last for ever.

In the whole letter he urged her to keep secrecy about their love. She was by nature reserved and this was no hardship. She obeyed this command of love long after she had lost him. The letter ended with : 'I will be as patient in illness and as believing in Love as I am able.'

Under this delusion of prying eyes the writing and the sending of letters to her must have been difficult to him. Once in a letter against the opening 'My dearest Girl' he put a note : 'I do not write this till the last that no eye may catch it.'

Mrs. Gisborne saw him again on July 12th. She was 'much pained by the sight of poor Keats, under sentence of death from Dr. Lamb. He never spoke and looks emaciated.' The 'sentence of death' may have been dramatic exaggeration ; certainly Dr. Lamb concurred in 'bleak' Dr. Darling's hope for recovery if he would winter in a warm climate. Keats also came again under the observant



eyes of little Mary Victoria Novello who was brought up to see her beloved Mr. Hunt. He was half-reclining, she said, on 'some chairs that formed a couch for him.' Mrs. Hunt cut a silhouette of Keats in this position. Mary Novello to the end of her long life never forgot the last time she saw Keats.

One day Hunt took him for a drive towards Hampstead. They alighted at Well Walk and sat on a bench there. The shadow of Tom fell upon him. For the first time his proud spirit failed and he broke down before Hunt. 'He suddenly,' Hunt said, 'turned upon me, his eyes swimming with tears, and told me he was dying of a broken heart.'

On August 10th a messenger called at Mortimer Terrace with a letter for Keats. Mrs. Hunt, busy with one of her children, told the maid to take it to him. The woman was leaving her the next day and was in a spiteful mood. Perhaps she had resented the extra work put upon her by the presence of the young invalid. She gave it to Thornton Hunt, a boy of ten, with an injunction not to give it to his mother until the day after she had left. On the 12th the boy gave it to Mrs. Hunt with the seal broken. Mrs. Gisborne, recording the incident, says that the letter 'contained not a word of the least consequence.' But it was from Fanny Brawne.

Keats was broken-hearted. He broke down completely, weeping for several hours. Disregarding entreaties and apologies, he left the house and went up to Hampstead.

He intended, as soon as he had explained the mishap to Fanny and received some measure of consolation from her, to go back to live with Mrs. Bentley. During Tom's illness Mrs. Bentley had become to the boys more than a landlady; she was their friend. Keats had felt his brother's death too poignantly to venture much into Well Walk and had more than once reproached himself with a neglect of her. Now he would take up his old quarters there. But Mrs. Brawne insisted that he should stay with her and be cared for by Fanny and herself as long as he remained in England.

In his last letter to Fanny he had written :

Every hour I am more and more concentrated in you ; every thing else tastes like chaff in my Mouth. I feel it almost impossible to go to Italy—the fact is I cannot leave you, and shall never taste one minute's content until it pleases chance to let me live with you for

good. . . . I shall never be able any more to endure the society of any of those who used to meet at Elm Cottage and Wentworth Place. The last two years taste like brass on my Palate. If I cannot live with you I will live alone. I do not think my health will improve much while I am separated from you.

Now he was living with her on the closest terms of intimacy possible without marriage. The curious expression 'the last two years taste like brass on my Palate' can be paralleled in *Hyperion* :

Instead of sweets, his ample palate took  
Savour of poisonous brass and metal sick :

The first mention of the taking of mercury for his health was two years and ten months before this, in October, 1817. We do not know how long he continued to take it : mercury, however, was a recognised medicine for consumption. A physical effect of continued doses of mercury is a brassy taste in the mouth. A mind, however great and powerful, is imprisoned in the body. Much of the unhealthy suspicion and jealousy which marred his love might in the early stages of the disease have been due to the faulty medical treatment of the time.

Keats was in a highly nervous condition. He wrote to Fanny Keats on August 14th, 'a person I am not quite used to entering the room half choaks me.' He was not, he believed, yet in consumption, 'but would be were I to remain in this climate all the Winter.' In his own heart he knew this to be otherwise. He was handing on to Fanny for her consolation the official view of his health.

On July 27th he had received a generously worded letter from Shelley at Pisa. Percy and Mary Shelley both urged that he should take up residence with them.

Shelley had kept up his first vivid interest in Keats in spite of a lack of response. Copies of his works were always sent to him. In regard to *Endymion*, Shelley wrote :

I have lately read your *Endymion* again & ever with a new sense of the treasures of poetry it contains, though treasures poured forth with indistinct profusion. This, people in general will not endure, & that is the cause of the comparatively few copies which have been sold.—I feel persuaded that you are capable of the greatest things, so you but will.

*The Cenci* had already been presented to Keats and *Prometheus Unbound* would follow. Of his own work Shelley wrote :

The *Cenci* . . . was studiously composed in a different style "Below the *good* how far! but far above the *great*" In poetry I have sought to avoid system & mannerism; I wish those who excel me in genius, would pursue the same plan—

Keats's reply to the invitation was grateful but ambiguous. He wrote : 'If I do not take advantage of your invitation, it will be prevented by a circumstance I have very much at heart to prophesy.' He ended his letter : 'In the hope of soon seeing you.' The first sentence is hard to interpret. It would seem as if he were either referring to a hope of having Brown as companion or to the dearer hope of its being possible for his love to accompany him.

About the poetry of them both, he wrote :

I am glad you take any pleasure in my poor poem, which I would willingly take the trouble to unwrite, if possible, did I care so much as I have done about reputation.

I received a copy of the *Cenci*. . . . There is only one part of it I am judge of—the poetry and dramatic effect, which by many spirits now-a-days is considered the Mammon. A modern work, it is said, must have a purpose, which may be the God. An artist must serve Mammon; he must have 'self-concentration'—selfishness, perhaps. You, I am sure, will forgive me for sincerely remarking that you might curb your magnanimity, and be more of an artist, and load every rift of your subject with ore. The thought of such discipline must fall like cold chains upon you, who perhaps never sat with your wings furled for six months together. And is not this extraordinary talk for the writer of *Endymion*, whose mind was like a pack of scattered cards? I am picked up and sorted to a pip. My imagination is a monastery, and I am its monk.

I am in expectation of *Prometheus* every day. Could I have my own wish effected, you would have it still in manuscript, or be now putting an end to the second act. I remember you advising me not to publish my first blights, on Hampstead Heath. I am returning advice upon your hands. Most of the poems of the volume I send you have been written above two years, and would never have been published but for the hope of gain; so you see I am inclined enough to take your advice now.

It will be remembered that there was in Shelley's pocket at death a copy of *Lamia* doubled back.

‘ . . . who perhaps never sat with your wings furled for six months together.’ How just and how lovely a picture of the ‘ beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain.’

Keats has been censured for these frank remarks to Shelley. Ardent Shelleyans regard them as impertinence. I do not see how they can be considered so. Keats and Shelley were, except to a small circle, little-known minor poets in their day : of the two, regarded not as men, but as poets, Keats probably had the wider reputation. And after all, Shelley had thrown down the challenge for Keats to take up. It was done good-naturedly and with a high respect on both sides.

There was no more poetry for Keats. He asked Hunt to send him up ‘ The Cap and Bells,’ which had been left behind him at Mortimer Terrace, but it is not likely that he added a word to it. His final achievement lay before him in the 1820 volume. He knew that the book was praised and admired by many and that his friends were proud : but it was only the palest shadow of his dreams and ambitions. The thought of the dread journey to an alien land haunted him day and night. But he was with Fanny. When he was dying, far away from her, he told Severn that the last summer days at Wentworth Place were the only peaceful ones he had ever spent.

## CHAPTER XIX

### *The 1820 Volume*

LAMIA, ISABELLA, THE EVE OF ST. AGNES, AND OTHER POEMS' was published in the first week of July at seven and sixpence. Taylor seems at first to have thought of publishing the book in five separate pamphlets at three shillings each, 'the whole in 1 Vol. 8vo., price 12 & 6.' There is a pencil note to this effect on the back of the 'Lamia' manuscript.

Taylor was enthusiastic about the book. He wrote: 'If it does not sell well, I think nothing will ever sell well again. I am sure of this, that for Poetic Genius there is not his equal living, and I would compare him against anyone with either Milton or Shakespeare for Beauties.' Hessey was equally pleased and said that he thought no single volume of poems had ever, taken as a whole, given him more real delight. One hundred and sixty copies were subscribed for, and Hessey reported with gratification to Taylor who was at Bath that on the day of publication a copy of *Endymion* was sold.

The book went fairly well: it had excellent reviews and probably would have sold much better if it had not appeared at an unfortunate time. Keats's ill luck held. The Town was gone mad over the attempt of George IV to pass 'The Bill of Pains and Penalties' through Parliament in order to rid himself of his wife, Princess Caroline, who was now in London claiming her rights as Queen. Every detail of the unsavoury process was eagerly scanned by the public, but the attempt to prove adultery was supported by discreditable witnesses and was so unpopular that the Bill was thrown out, but not until November 10th. The sea of pamphlets, lampoons and caricatures rose higher. The public had little thought for buying or reading printed matter on any other subject and the bookselling trade suffered badly. The publicity gained by the good reviews was lost. Sales fell off and as late as March, 1822, not five hundred copies had been sold.

Feeling ran almost as high in Scotland. In Edinburgh the mob raged about the city breaking the windows of the citizens who would not illuminate with candles for 'the Queen.' This was a pretty habit of Georgian crowds. But one private individual in East Lothian read *Lamia* and admired it so much that he wrote begging Keats to come and make a long stay with him, promising him quiet in which to work, 'soothing affection' and 'a select and extensive' library of books. This generous soul was John Aitken, afterwards editor of *Constable's Miscellany*, but now merely a teller (cashier) in a bank.

Taylor and Woodhouse made the final choice of the poems to be published. Keats was too ill to be troubled in the matter. Perhaps all the available poems were not before them. It seems strange that they omitted the best of the sonnets, 'Meg Merrilies' and, above all, 'La Belle Dame sans Merci.' 'La Belle Dame' is so familiar to us and so closely knit to the name of Keats that it is easy to forget that it was not included in the 1820 volume.

This ballad had a stronger effect on mid-Victorian verse than perhaps any other of Keats's poems. When the Melmscott Press edition of Keats was being printed the work was brought sheet by sheet to William Morris for inspection. When the page containing 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' was brought up, Morris began to read it quietly but soon looked up in hot indignation. The editor had used the revised version with 'wretched wight' for 'knight at arms,' verses four and five transposed and the changes in verse seven Keats had made to avoid the 'kisses four' which he feared were too particular a catalogue. Rapidly changing the poem back to its original form, Morris exclaimed: "Why, this was the germ from which all the poetry of my group has sprung!" Why had this one short poem such an influence? It contained in concentrated form and with a human appeal the strong magic, the primal quality brought back into English poetry by Coleridge, coming deviously to us through the German, to be grafted on such rooted British stock as:

There were twa sisters sat in a bour,  
*Binnorie, O Binnorie!*  
 There cam a knight to be their wooer  
*By the bonnie milldams o' Binnorie.*

'La Belle Dame sans Merci' is now a part of our heritage from childhood and its slow, magic, rhythm has almost the force of a rune :

O what can ail thee Knight at arms  
Alone and palely loitering ?  
The sedge has withered from the Lake  
And no birds sing !

Keats's own generation might have called it affected and would certainly have held it to be irregular. Taylor knew his business and perhaps he deliberately rejected it. The comparatively dull 'Robin Hood' was in a strain made familiar by Scott and was quoted in full by more than one reviewer.

'Lamia,' the first poem in the volume, Keats himself thought would be popular. He wrote of it : 'I am certain there is that sort of fire in it which must take hold of people in some way—give them either pleasant or unpleasant sensation. What they want is a sensation of some sort.' Although Keats had declared earlier that he 'never wrote one single Line of Poetry with the least Shadow of public thought,' it is possible that 'Lamia' was written to some extent with the poetry-reading public in mind. Keats was wanting money badly and he wanted Fanny for his wife. There are the two Byronic touches that break the illusion of the story, the opening ten lines of Part II beginning

Love in a hut, with water and a crust,  
Is—Love, forgive us !—cinders, ashes, dust ;

and the affronting

Let the mad poets say whate'er they please  
Of the sweets of Faeries, Peris, Goddesses,  
There is not such a treat among them all,  
Haunters of cavern, lake, and waterfall,  
As a real woman, lineal indeed  
From Pyrrha's pebbles or old Adam's seed.

This passage was not, so far as we know, criticised in Keats's own generation. The ears of readers were attuned to Byron's chatty style in writing of women :

she was one  
Fit for the model of a statuary  
(A race of mere imposters, when all's done—  
I've seen much finer women, ripe and real,  
Than all the nonsense of their stone ideal).

There was at least one more passage in a familiar style which Keats had the sense to omit in the printed version describing the wedding-feast and the behaviour of the guests, ending :

Another whispers. "Poo!" saith Glutton "Mum!"  
Then makes his shiny mouth a napkin for his thumb.

Keats took trouble to get the period of the story right. He read *Archæologia Græca*, by John Potter, a heavy treatise on the antiquities of Greece, and he adhered closely to the detail given.

The handling of the couplets in 'Lamia' is markedly skilful. In *Endymion* one can read line after line in places and forget that the poem is in couplets. This in itself was an achievement and a direct challenge to the closed and marshalled couplets of Pope, but it was bringing the couplet too close to blank verse. The accented rimes at the end of the lines are the backbone of the couplet and make its virility. In 'Lamia' the accent is sure and the danger of monotony avoided by an occasional dropping or lightening of the accent and by the introduction of the alexandrine. The extent of the poetic influence which had brought about this strengthening of Keats's handling of the couplet can be shown by a simple experiment :

UPON a time, before the faery broods  
Drove Nymph and Satyr from the prosperous woods,  
Before king Oberon's bright diadem,  
Sceptre, and mantle, clasp'd with dewy gem,  
Frighted away the Dryads and the Fauns  
From rushes green, and brakes, and cowslip'd lawns,  
*A milk-white Hind, immortal and unchang'd,*  
*Fed on the lawns, and in the forest rang'd.*

The last couplet is the opening one of Dryden's 'The Hind and the Panther.'

It does not, I hope, detract from the value of the poem to suggest that the writing of the verse of 'Lamia' was to Keats something in the nature of an exercise. Shakespeare, Spenser and Chaucer were his natural ancestors; Milton and Dryden were godparents who taught him valuable lessons. In 'Lamia' the influence of Dryden is apparent and gives strength to both form and narrative, but Keats's own natural verse is more fluid and in a sense richer. There are lines in



'Lamia' which for me lift themselves up on the page; lines which have a fluency and a warmer beauty, such as

Upon her crest she wore a wannish fire . . .  
 . . . Warm, tremulous, devout, psalterian . . .  
 . . . About a young bird's flutter from a wood.

These are not always the finest lines, but they sound to me in the authentic voice of Keats.

The poem is a mixture, as one of his critics pointed out, of classic and romantic; a skilful mixture, but not quite blended. The two styles are used in passages of outstanding beauty. One of the lovely romantic passages beginning 'A haunting music, sole perhaps and lone' was singled out by the critics as magical. Of simpler, objective beauty is

They were enthroned, in the even tide,  
 Upon a couch, near to a curtaining  
 Whose airy texture, from a golden string,  
 Floated into the room, and let appear  
 Unveil'd the summer heaven, blue and clear,  
 Betwixt two marble shafts :—there they reposed,  
 Where use had made it sweet, with eyelids closed,  
 Saving a tythe which love still open kept,  
 That they might see each other while they almost slept ;

The 'moral' of the story has been criticised. It has been generally accepted that Keats meant Lamia to be poetry and Appolonius science and this allegorical interpretation has been linked with his support of Lamb at the 'immortal dinner' when he maintained that Newton had destroyed the beauty of the rainbow. This may be so : it seems a pity to search for secondary meanings in poems unless an allegory be deliberately presented. The weakness of the theory is admittedly that poetry is symbolised by a demon in the form of a snake; though it has a measure of support in the 'demon poesy' in the 'Ode on Indolence.' Mr. Claude Lee Finney has suggested that Lamia stands for poetry, the citizens of Corinth (shown as a badly behaved crowd in the passage Keats cut out) for the public who did not appreciate his poems and Appolonius for the reviewers who judged the poems by the standard of fact and reason. This is neat, but rather humourless for Keats, and also has the same weakness that poetry is represented as a demon.

'Isabella' was the earliest written of the narrative poems

## FINIS.

On sitting down to read King Lear once again.

O Golden-tongued Romance, with serene lute!

Fair plumed Syren, Queen of far-away!

Leave me mels dipping on this wintry day

I shut up thine olden Pages, and be mute.

Adieu! for, once again, the fierce dispute,

Between Damnation and impassion'd clay

Must I burn through; once more humbly away

The bitter-sweet of this Shakespearian fruit.

Chief Poet! and ye Clouds of Albion,

Begethers of <sup>our</sup> ~~this~~ deep eternal theme!

When through the old oak forest I am gone,

Let me not wander in a barren dream:

But, when I am consumed in the fire,

Give me new Phoenix wings to fly <sup>to my</sup> ~~at my~~ desire.

Jan<sup>y</sup>. 22. 1811.

SONNET WRITTEN BY JOHN KEATS IN HIS FOLIO EDITION  
OF SHAKESPEARE ON A BLANK SPACE FACING THE OPENING  
OF KING LEAR



and is a bridge between *Endymion* and 'The Eve of St. Agnes.' It was, as Woodhouse predicted, the most popular in Keats's own generation. Its simple pathos was easily felt and understood. The incident of Lorenzo's ghost was in the familiar tradition of the Radcliffian and German tales and plays of horror. There was too a growing fashion for Italian literature heralded two years before by the enthusiasm of the Leigh Hunt circle. Hunt had pointed out what fine subjects there were for poems in Boccaccio's tales and had mentioned 'The Pot of Basil' and 'The Falcon.' Hazlitt, in his 1818 lectures, had stated this more publicly, saying that the story of 'Isabella . . . if executed with taste and spirit, could not fail to succeed in the present day.' On this encouragement Keats and Reynolds decided to combine in a volume of metrical translations of the *Decameron*. Reynolds's engagement and legal career prevented him from carrying out his side of the bargain and 'Isabella' was the only fruit of Keats's determination. Reynolds, in 1821, published two versions, 'The Garden of Florence' and 'The Ladye of Provence,' and W. H. Procter took 'The Pot of Basil' and 'The Falcon' and made one into a poem and the other into a play. Hunt's *Story of Rimini* and his translations of Italian poetry had, combined with the wider knowledge of Italy brought home by the many travellers in that post-war age, widened this enthusiasm of a literary circle into something of a vogue, so that we find in 1820 even the sober *Edinburgh Magazine* writing about Italian poetry and publishing translations.

Hazlitt, in the lecture Keats heard in 1818, had linked with the *Decameron* the tales of Chaucer which, he said, modern writers might be well advised to render into modern English after the fashion of Dryden. This may have left a twisted subconscious memory in Keats's mind, for he wrote his version of 'The Pot of Basil' in the Chaucerian manner of digressions and invocations. The outburst against Isabella's brothers (stanzas XV-VII) may interrupt the story but it is in the Chaucerian manner. In writing it in the *ottava rima* he was, however, challenging public opinion; this measure with its triple rime had been popularised by Byron and had come to be associated with satire or light-hearted gallantry. Though Keats's handling is here and there uncertain, it is a tribute to his general success in the metre that no adverse

criticism was offered on this score by fine critics like Hunt and Lamb.

Keats's own opinion of the poem was, as we know, adverse. He called it 'a weak-sided Poem.' 'There is,' he wrote, 'too much inexperience of life, and simplicity of knowledge in it—which might do very well after one's death—but not while one is alive.' He thought the critics would find 'an amusing sober-sadness about it.' Reynolds, a shrewd judge of the public taste, assured him that it had 'that simplicity and quiet pathos, which are of sure Sovereignty over all hearts.' He urged Keats to publish it as quickly as possible as an answer to the *Quarterly's* ridicule of *Endymion*. In a generous letter he assessed his own value to posterity, writing: 'Do you get *Fame*,—and I shall have it in being your affectionate and steady friend.'

It is ungrateful to point out the occasional immaturities in 'Isabella' and unnecessary to praise its beauty and power; the light rich beauty of

Parting they seem'd to tread upon the air,  
Twin roses by the zephyr blown apart  
Only to meet again more close, and share  
The inward fragrance of each other's heart.  
She, to her chamber gone, a ditty fair  
Sang, of delicious love and honey'd dart;  
He with light steps went up a western hill,  
And bade the sun farewell, and joy'd his fill.

the restrained power of:

There was Lorenzo slain and buried in,  
There in that forest did his great love cease;  
Ah! when a soul doth thus its freedom win,  
It aches in loneliness—is ill at peace  
As the break-covert blood-hounds of such sin:  
They dipp'd their swords in the water, and did tease  
Their horses homeward, with a convulsed spur,  
Each richer by his being a murderer.

and the pathos of:

Piteous she look'd on dead and senseless things,  
Asking for her lost Basil amorously;  
And with melodious chuckle in the strings  
Of her lorn voice, she oftentimes would cry  
After the Pilgrim in his wanderings,  
To ask him where her Basil was; and why  
'Twas hid from her: "For cruel 'tis," said she,  
"To steal my Basil-pot away from me."

'The Eve of St. Agnes,' the next in the volume, is enchantment. Little can or need be said about its heady and perfumed loveliness. I can never read this poem without being so bound by its spell that in its last verses I always hold my breath in fear lest the escaping lovers should be caught and the rich dream broken. Keats had written in 1817: 'I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty.' If this poem is not essential beauty created by love, his great love for a woman, it is a rainbow symbol of it, an arc in heaven. It seems impossible that it was written before 'Lamia.'

It has amused lovers of Keats that the subject of this lovely poem was suggested to him 'by a Mrs. Jones.' The only other fact we knew about her was that Keats had lent or given her one of his books. Now, since the publication of Mr. Blunden's *Keats's Publisher*, we can mitigate the baldness of this name. She was 'the beautiful Mrs. Jones, a friend of Taylor's, and her name was Isabella.'<sup>1</sup> In 1818 she gave a house-warming party at 57 Lamb's Conduit Street. After Keats's death she read and discussed with Taylor the biographical material he had collected for his intended memoir of Keats. Mr. Ridley has pointed out that Mrs. Jones probably brought the legend of St. Agnes' Eve to Keats's attention in a homely chap-book entitled *Mother Bunches Closet newly broke open*.

The management of colour in Keats's poems is always interesting and particularly so in 'The Eve of St. Agnes.' The main body of the poem is in effect rich and glowing, but on examination it will be found that colour-words are not used as frequently as one would expect. Of the colours of the spectrum only the softer *blue* and *violet* are used. Yellow is heightened and enriched into *gold*. *Red* appeared twice in an early draft, but was cut out in the final version. The violence of this colour he softened into *rose*, the colour of love, and linked it with Porphyro. *Blue* ('Blue! 'Tis the life of heaven'), the tender colour of purity, of the Virgin's cloak he reserved for Madeline. Curiously enough green, the colour of youth and hope, is not employed at all. *Silver*, *gold* and *black* are employed with dramatic effect; *silver* to hold to attention the constant background of cold and moonlight,

<sup>1</sup> Her portrait by Chalon was in the Academy Exhibition, 1819.

*gold* to give a splendour of touch and *black* as contrast. They run as pointing threads through the web of the story.

The poem opens with the Beadsman in the ancient chapel in a chill grey world. The key-word of the first two lines is 'a-cold':

St. Agnes' Eve—Ah, bitter chill it was !  
The owl, for all his feathers, was *a-cold*.

It ends in chilling age with the same word :

The Beadsman, after thousand aves told,  
For aye unsought for slept among his ashes cold.

The 'sculptur'd dead' are prisoned 'in *black*, purgatorial rails.' As the Beadsman leaves the icy chapel he hears in the castle 'Music's *golden* tongue,' but this bright image is immediately followed by the dulling thought of the age of the Beadsman 'flatter'd to tears.' 'Already had his death bell rung.' Then, returning to music in stanza IV,

the *silver* snarling trumpets 'gan to chide

In three stanzas we have already *black*, *gold* and *silver*. In stanza V '*argent* revelry' warms up very slightly the silver-cold background, ushering in the 'rich array' and splendour of the ball. Madeline is introduced and the legend in which she is wrapped. Maidens, if they wish to see their lovers on this enchanted night, must 'couch supine their beauties, *lilly white*.' There is music and dancing in VII and VIII, but still no colour. The first hint of colour comes in stanza IX with Porphyro whose heart is '*on fire*' for Madeline. With the lover comes the first direct mention of moonlight and from now on, the poem is drenched in the magic of the moon, a chill wan moon, a moon of faint faery, a fitting background for the colour of love. Old Angela takes Porphyro to 'a little *moonlight* room' and

Feebly she laugheth in the languid moon,  
While Porphyro upon her face doth look,  
Like puzzled urchin on an aged crone  
Who keepeth clos'd a wond'rous riddle-book,  
As spectacl'd she sits in chimney nook.  
But soon his eyes grew brilliant, when she told  
His lady's purpose ; and he scarce could brook  
Tears, at the thought of those enchantments cold,  
And Madeline asleep in lap of legends old.

Then comes the first note of strong colour :

Sudden a thought came like a *full-blown rose*,  
Flushing his brow, and in his pained heart  
Made *purple* riot :

In the next stanza but one he is '*burning* Porphyro.' The colour then fades back into the pale enchantment of the legend. The lover follows the old woman 'through many a *dusky* gallery' to 'The maiden's chamber, silken, hush'd and chaste.' With the re-entrance of Madeline into the narrative the accentuating thread of *silver* comes uppermost with '*silver* taper's light,' vanishing into the soft radiance of the moon with

Out went the taper as she hurried in ;  
Its little smoke, in pallid moonshine, died :

In XXIV, with its detailed description of the room beginning 'A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,' there is no more definite colour than in

A shielded scutcheon *blush'd* with *blood* of queens and kings.

Here the poem breaks into rich colour, but colour drenched in moonlight :

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,  
And threw *warm gules* on Madeline's fair breast,  
As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon ;  
*Rose-bloom* fell on her hands, together prest,  
And on her *silver* cross soft *amethyst*,  
And on her hair a *glory, like a saint* :  
She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest,  
Save wings, for heaven :—Porphyro grew faint :  
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.

Here again is the accentuating silver thread and the gold. In Madeline's unrobing there is no colour. When she is in bed the red of love may be suggested in '*poppied* warmth,' though here Keats probably intended to convey white as in the drowsing opium poppies. Heralding the full colour of love at the end of this beautiful stanza is the indirect black of '*swart* Paynims.' The colour comes fully but more delicately with the girl than in Porphyro's '*full-blown rose*' :

Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,  
*As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again.*

There is a gleam of the golden thread in *sunshine*.



There is now no colour until the story nears the height of the drama. It is heralded again by the silver, gold and black here linked with the colour of love :

Then by the bed-side, where the faded moon  
Made a dim, *silver* twilight, soft he set  
A table, and, half anguish'd, threw thereon  
A cloth of woven *crimson*, *gold* and *jet* :—

In the delicate food he piles upon the table there is, surprisingly, no colour. We taste rather than see the food in smooth slipping syllables like 'lucent syrups tinct with cinnamon.' This was one of Keats's own favourite lines. In this stanza the only colour is in the first line :

Then  
And still she slept an *azure*-lidded sleep,  
These delicacies he heap'd with glowing hand  
On *golden* dishes and in baskets bright  
Of wreathed *silver* : sumptuous they stand  
In the retired quiet of the night,  
Filling the chilly room with perfume light.—

There is a hint of black when the lovers embrace within the *dusk* curtains and gold is repeated in 'Broad *golden* fringe upon the carpet lies.' Madeline opens 'Her *blue* affrayed eyes.' For two stanzas there is no colour, and then :

Beyond a mortal man impassion'd far  
At these voluptuous accents, he arose,  
Ethereal, *flush'd*, and like a throbbing star  
Seen mid the *sapphire* heaven's deep repose ;  
Into her dream he melted, as the *rose*  
Blendeth its odour with the *violet*,—  
Solution sweet : meantime the frost-wind blows  
Like Love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet  
Against the window-panes ; St. Agnes' moon hath set.

Blue and rose blend in their union. Here both the colour and the moonlight fade from the story in :

Thy beauty's shield, heart-shap'd and *vermeil* dyed ?  
Ah, *silver* shrine, here will I take my rest

The lovers steal away through crowded, hurrying stanzas in the dark, with only one more wavering touch of light :

A chain-droop'd lamp was flickering by each door ;  
 The arras, rich with horseman, hawk, and hound,  
 Flutter'd in the besieging wind's uproar ;  
 And the long carpets rose along the gusty floor.

Love and beauty have left the ancient castle. The poem ends as it had begun in chill and age.

The subdued and sparing use of colour, conveying rather than displaying an effect of splendour, was a lesson hardly learnt by Keats's disciples later in the century. They in giving colour to their pictures, both actual and verbal, scarcely avoided the picturesque. Browning in sardonic mood put this deftly in his 'Popularity' :

Hobbs hints blue,—straight he turtle eats :  
 Nobbs prints blue,—claret crowns his cup :  
 Nokes outdares Stokes in azure feats,—  
 Both gorge. Who fished the murex up ?  
 What porridge had John Keats ?

This is putting it dramatically. Browning would have admitted that Keats did not only recover in poetry the almost forgotten murex-dye, the splendour of colour ; he used it as a master craftsman.

When in 1848 Lord Houghton published the *Life, Letters and Literary Remains of John Keats*, his work was 'priced and saleable at last.' Edward Moxon brought out edition after edition. Others drank the fine claret he had savoured at pleasant intervals.

The Odes in the 1820 volume are too loved and familiar to need much comment. It is a tribute to their greatness that most people qualified to judge of the merit of poetry will put them in varying order. Rossetti's order was: 'Urn,' 'Psyche,' 'Autumn,' 'Melancholy,' 'Nightingale.' To take only one of the later critics, Dr. Bridges ; his order was, 'Nightingale,' 'Autumn,' 'Melancholy,' 'Psyche,' 'Urn.' He placed on a line with them the 'Ode on Indolence' and the 'Ode to Sorrow' in *Endymion* which he regarded as one of the greatest of Keats's achievements. Swinburne thought the 'Nightingale' 'one of the final masterpieces of human work in all time' and found the Odes 'unequalled and unrivalled,' saying of them :

Of these perhaps the two nearest to absolute perfection, to the triumphant achievement and accomplishment of the very utmost

beauty possible to human words, may be that to Autumn and that on the Grecian Urn ; the most radiant, fervent, and musical is that to a Nightingale ; the most pictorial and perhaps the tenderest in its ardour of passionate fancy is that to Psyche ; the subtlest in sweetness of thought and feeling is that on Melancholy. Greater lyrical poetry the world may have seen than any that is in these ; lovelier it surely has never seen, nor ever can it possibly see.

The fragment 'To Maia' he called 'divine.' Colvin presumably placed the 'Grecian Urn' highest, for he called it 'a true masterpiece.' Tennyson used to recite lines from the 'Nightingale' as expressive of 'the innermost soul of poetry.' Contemporary critics thought the 'Nightingale,' 'To Autumn' and the 'Grecian Urn' the finest, although the 'Urn' was rarely quoted. The 'Nightingale' and 'To Autumn' were in a vein more familiar to contemporary romantics ; of delight in nature and the contemplation of death and human sorrow. The nightingale was a natural subject to those read in old literature : it had been handled in modern poetry by Wordsworth and Coleridge.

It is typical of Keats's reserve that the three strongly personal odes, the 'Nightingale,' the 'Urn' and 'To Melancholy' are not mentioned in his letters beyond a passing light reference to the 'Nightingale.' George, on his visit to England, was copying it on a snowy day 'which is,' Keats wrote, 'like reading an account of the black hole at Calcutta on an ice bergh.'

The legend of the composition of the 'Nightingale' is fittingly romantic. One spring evening in 1819 Keats and Severn were spending the evening with some friends at the Spaniard's Inn on the Heath. Keats quietly disappeared from the company and Severn, going out in search of him, found him lying up on the little hill under the group of pines known to us as 'Constable's Firs,' and listening to a nightingale. Severn made a picture of the scene in that series of loving memories of his friend he was painting right up to his death. Brown tells us that Keats found solace and delight in the song of a bird whose mate had nested in the Wentworth Place garden. One May morning he sat out under the plum-tree to the left of the house for two or three hours. He came indoors with two closely written sheets of paper in his hand. On Brown coming suddenly upon him he thrust the papers

behind some books. It is understandable that he did not want to talk so near to its creation of such a personal poem. The close attention of Brown and of Woodhouse to his work must have been at times irksome to him, though without it much might have been lost to us. Brown tells us that he would write his short poems on any slips of paper that came to hand and would not trouble further about them. Brown was constantly on the watch for these precious scraps of manuscript.

The conception of the happy nightingale, a conception unknown to the old poetry, came perhaps from Coleridge's 'The Nightingale' in *Sibylline Leaves* with its haunting line made with Coleridge's individual magic out of plain words.

In Nature there is nothing melancholy.

This lovely poem has been shadowed over by the wider fame of Keats's Ode. Before and after Keats heard Coleridge talking of nightingales in Millfield Lane he must have read with loving concentration the 'Conversation Poem' and let it sink into his being as unconscious preparation for his own work. How lovely is the picture of the nightingales :

On moon-lit bushes,  
Whose dewy leafits are but half disclosed,  
You may perchance behold them on the twigs,  
Their bright, bright eyes, their eyes both bright and full,  
Glistening, while many a glow-worm in the shade  
Lights up her love-torch.

'Leafits' was used by Keats in 'Isabella' in

So that the jewel, safely casketed,  
Came forth, and in perfumed leafits spread.

The word was damned by one critic as 'affectation.' Unfortunately Coleridge himself altered it in later versions of his 'Nightingale' to the more commonplace 'leaflets'; perhaps as the result of a similar criticism.

The sensuous beauty of the 'Ode to a Nightingale' has an early and enduring appeal, but the restrained loveliness of the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' is for maturer minds. The shape of the poem, the slow rise and fall of the lines are inevitable. If 'The Eve of St. Agnes' can be called the creation of 'essential Beauty' out of love, the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' is a creation of beauty, eternal beauty out of

spiritual power and contemplation. The last triumphant lines can be paralleled in the letters by utterances on Truth and Beauty, but their meaning cannot be logically explained; it can only be felt :

Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty,—That is all  
Ye know on Earth, and all ye need to know.

I have given this not as printed in the 1820 volume, but as it is in the first publication of the ode in the *Annals of the Fine Arts* early in the same year. Of the poem there is no known holograph, but it was H. Buxton Forman's opinion that the pointing and capitalling of this version are characteristic of Keats. The version in the volume, together with other of the poems, was almost certainly subjected to 'editing' by Taylor.

Matthew Arnold pointed out that in these two great odes Keats has exercised both 'the power of natural magic' and 'the power of Greek radiance'; the first in that stanza full of the beauty, the sight, the smell, the soft murmurings of an English wood in spring :

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet  
Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild ;  
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine ;  
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves ;  
And mid-May's eldest child,  
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

and in

. . . magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

and the second, 'the power of Greek radiance' in lines 5, 6 and 7 of

Who are these coming to the sacrifice ?  
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,  
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,  
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest ?  
What little town by river or sea shore,  
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,  
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn ?  
And, little town, thy streets for evermore  
Will silent be ; and not a soul to tell  
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

These lines, Arnold said, are 'as Greek as a thing from Homer or Theocritus . . . compared with the eye on the object, a radiance and light clearness being added.'

The sources of the Ode, the living creatures 'in old marbles ever beautiful' on frieze, on vase have been traced by Sir Sidney Colvin and abundantly illustrated in his *John Keats*. There one may see depicted the gracious movement, 'Attic shape, Fair attitude,' the pipes and timbrels and the ecstasy.

The 'Ode to Psyche' is a more conscious creation. Keats told his brother that he had composed it with great care. Its shape is lovely and accomplished. There is in it the delicacy and tenderness of young love. Psyche is a human goddess, the soul dwelling with earthly love. In 'some untrodden region' of the poet's mind her 'rosy sanctuary' is set rich in natural beauty where there shall be for her

all soft delight  
That shadowy thought can win,  
A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,  
To let the warm Love in!

Professor H. W. Garrod has pointed out in these lines a rich content that had, I believe, escaped most people. Psyche, the soul, was represented by the Greeks as a butterfly or moth. Psyche and love are fused in a fluttering image drawn into the mind by a bright awareness, the torch of a watchful intelligence. The ode was written in the May of 1819. In July Keats wrote in his first love-letter:

For myself I know not how to express my devotion to so fair a form: I want a brighter word than bright, a fairer word than fair. I almost wish we were butterflies and liv'd but three summer days—three such days with you I could fill with more delight than fifty common years could ever contain.

The next poem in the volume is fittingly a happy one, 'Fancy.' So far as we know it was the first poem he wrote after his brother's death and probably soon after his engagement. There is a substratum of melancholy; the sad circumstance of his life had made happiness suspect to him but the tone of the poem is happy. The opening of the poem sings:

Ever let the fancy roam,  
Pleasure never is at home:  
At a touch sweet Pleasure melteth,  
Like to bubbles when rain pelteth;

The ode beginning 'Bards of Passion and of Mirth' is one that, except that it links on to the following 'Lines on the Mermaid Tavern,' might well have been omitted from the volume to make way for 'The Eve of St. Mark' or 'La Belle Dame sans Merci.' The vision of the Bards

Seated on Elysian lawns  
Brows'd by none but Dian's fawns ;  
Underneath large blue-bells tented,  
Where the daisies are rose-scented,  
And the rose herself has got  
Perfume which on earth is not ;

seems rather more childish than Elysian and ungrateful to the living beauties of earth. Who wants bluebells as large as tents and perfumed daisies? The buoyant 'Lines on the Mermaid Tavern' no one would spare. The vision of the Poets

Sipping beverage divine,  
And pledging with contented smack  
The Mermaid in the Zodiac.

has a feeling of authenticity and is much pleasanter.

'Robin Hood,' I feel to be a thread of homespun rather out of place though it is cheerful and shows another aspect of Keats. 'To Autumn' is a ripe perfection and all the more grateful since we get in this uncertain climate so few of the golden days when Autumn is kind and warm, a

Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun.

The poem is at once a living joy and a lovely memory.

The 'Ode to Melancholy' is to many the most difficult of the odes to read with understanding. Although in essence universal, it is 'period' in feeling. A fine and cultivated melancholy was an aspect of the romantic muse and one encouraged by Byron. Although it had its roots in the eighteenth century 'graveyard school,' it was perhaps as truly a result of the miseries brought on Europe by the wars and by economic change as the bitterness and dejection of spirit which has not yet passed away from our own contemporary literature. Keats has lifted this melancholy from a mood to a truth. There can be no pleasure without pain, no light without shadow. The law of life is contrast.

Ay, in the very temple of delight  
 Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,  
 Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue  
 Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine ;  
 His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,  
 And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

In the first stanza there is again a presentment of Psyche as moth but here in reference to the soul departing from the body :

Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be  
 Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl  
 A partner in your sorrow's mysteries ;

If Keats had been in health, 'Hyperion' would probably not have been included in the *Lamia* volume. Apart from its incomplete condition he regarded it with disfavour as too Miltonic and had embodied passages from it in 'The Fall of Hyperion.' On the flyleaf of the volume Taylor and Hessey apologised for its unfinished state, saying it was included 'at their particular request.' This looks as if at first he had refused to allow it to be printed. He certainly provided no manuscript for the poem which was printed from Woodhouse's transcript. In a copy presented to BurrIDGE Davenport of Hampstead, Keats struck out this advertisement, writing above it : 'This is none of my doing—I was ill at the time.' The final sentence which ran : 'The poem was intended to have been of equal length with *ENDYMION*, but the reception given to that work discouraged the author from proceeding' he commented on angrily with 'This is a lie.'

The reviews proved how right Taylor was to publish 'Hyperion'; the poem gained far more unqualified praise than any other. It was singled out by private as well as public critics as the finest thing in the volume. Shelley found *Lamia* 'in other respects insignificant enough, but containing the fragment of a poem called "Hyperion" ... it is certainly an astonishing piece of writing, and gives me a conception of Keats which I confess I had not before.' Four months later he wrote to the same correspondent, Peacock, 'if the "Hyperion" be not grand poetry, none has been produced by our contemporaries.' To Hunt he wrote that 'Hyperion' placed Keats among those destined to become the 'first writers of the age.' Lord Byron, when he did bring himself



to read the volume, said, 'it seems actually inspired by the Titans' and, echoing the *New Monthly*, added, 'as sublime as Æschylus.'

The arrangement of the poems is admirable and the putting of 'Hyperion' last an inspiration. It makes a magnificent finish and links with the poem before, the 'Ode to Melancholy,' in the description of Thea :

But oh ! how unlike marble was that face :  
How beautiful, if sorrow had not made  
Sorrow more beautiful than Beauty's self.

The large, sad, inevitable opening leads on from the more emotional and bitter-sweet ode :

DEEP in the shady sadness of a vale  
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,  
Far from the fiery noon, and eve's one star,  
Sat gray-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone,  
Still as the silence round about his lair ;  
Forest on forest hung about his head  
Like cloud on cloud. No stir of air was there,  
Not so much life as on a summer's day  
Robs not one light seed from the feather'd grass,  
But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest.

Although Keats had written in full the two last lines of the poem it ends, the last poem in the volume, as his life was soon to be, broken, incomplete.

The first public mention of *Lamia* beyond a formal advertisement was in the *Literary Gazette* for Saturday, July 1st. A copy of Mr. Keats's new volume of poetry 'on the eve of publication' had been received too late for review and the journal presented 'by way of novelty the following specimens from the minor productions,' printing the 'Ode to a Nightingale,' 'Lines on the Mermaid Tavern' and 'To Autumn.' These quotations were probably of more value than a set review in the *Literary Gazette*, at least if it were written by the editor, William Jerdan, who was said by his fellow-journalists to acquire knowledge of books sent in by cutting the leaves and smelling the paper-knife !

The most important review in July was the one almost certainly written by Charles Lamb in the *New Times*. Lamb was an ardent admirer of Keats's work and placed him, admittedly as a poet of a different type, 'next to Words-

worth.' This was, indeed, high praise from Wordsworth's admiring friend. Tom Hood tells us that in later years at Colebrooke Cottage once when Wordsworth was present there was 'a discussion on the value of the promissory notes issued by our younger poets, wherein Wordsworth named Shelley, and Lamb took John Keats for choice.'

Lamb headed the review with those warm, rich-hued stanzas in 'The Eve of St. Agnes' describing Madeline's unrobing and falling to sleep in her 'soft and chilly nest,' stanzas XXIV-VII:

Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,  
As though a rose should shut and be a bud again.

He wrote of them:

Such is the description which Mr. Keats has given us with a delicacy worthy of Christabel, of a high-born damsel, in one of the apartments of a baronial castle, laying herself down devoutly to dream on the charmed Eve of St. Agnes; and like the radiance, which comes from those old windows upon the limbs and garments of the damsel, is the almost Chaucer-like painting with which this poet illumines every subject he touches—We have scarcely anything like it in modern description—It brings us back to ancient days, and

*Beauty making-beautiful old rhymes*

It will be remembered that the *Literary Journal* reviewer employed this Shakespearean quotation in his praise of a line of *Endymion*.

Lamb considered 'Isabella' to be the finest poem in the volume, especially commending 'the anticipation of the assassination . . .' in one epithet in the narration of the ride:

So the two brothers, and their *murder'd* man  
Rode past fair Florence to where Arno's stream  
Gurgles. . . .

Of the description of Isabella and her nurse finding the body of Lorenzo he said, quoting the stanzas XLVI-VIII, that 'there is nothing more awfully simple in diction, more nakedly grand and moving in sentiment, in Dante, in Chaucer, or in Spenser.' Referring to 'the divine germ' of the story in Boccaccio he wrote, 'it is a long while since we read the original; and in this affecting revival of it we do but

*Weep away a long-forgotten woe.'*

In 'Lamia' he pointed to the epithet 'Star of Lethe' for Hermes as 'one of those prodigal phrases which Mr. Keats abounds in, which are each a poem in a word, and which in this instance lays open to us at once, like a picture, all the dim regions and their inhabitants and the sudden coming of the celestial among them.' He found 'Lamia' 'more exuberantly rich in imagery and painting' and of 'as gorgeous stuff as ever romance was composed of.' The marvels and the splendours of the story 'are all that fairy land can do for us' but

They are for younger impressibilities. To us an ounce of feeling is worth a pound of fancy; and therefore we recur again, with a warmer gratitude, to the story of Isabella and the pot of basil, and those never-cloying stanzas which we have cited, and which we think should disarm criticism if it be not in its nature cruel; if it would not deny to honey its sweetness, nor to roses redness nor light to the stars in Heaven; if it would not buy the moon out of the skies, rather than acknowledge she is fair.

He made no mention of the odes or of 'Hyperion' which was the poem singled out for highest praise by the majority of the reviewers. Lamb's tastes in literature were formed when Wordsworth and his circle were in full revolt against a frozen classicism; romantic themes were dearer to him. Hunt reprinted Lamb's review in the *Examiner* with the comment, 'The poet and the critic are worthy of each other—a rare coincidence when the first is good.'

The *Monthly Review* for July found that the volume displayed 'the ore of true poetic genius, though mingled with a large proportion of dross.' Unread in the store-house of Elizabethan literature, the reviewer found in Keats's boldly coined and highly individual language a frequent 'affectation of quaint phrases' but was broad-minded enough to admit that experiments must be made and that 'Innovations of every kind, more especially in matters of taste, are at first beheld with dislike and jealousy, and it is only by time and usage that we can appreciate their claims to adoption.' He continued:

Very few persons, probably, will admire Mr. Keats on a short acquaintance; and the light and frivolous never will. If we would enjoy his poetry, we must think over it; and on this very account, which is perhaps the surest proof of its merit, we are

afraid that it will be slighted. Unfortunately, Mr. Keats may blame himself for much of this neglect; since he might have conceded something to established taste, or, (if he will) established prejudice, without derogating from his own originality of thought and spirit.

He found Mr. Keats 'often laboriously obscure' and sometimes indulging 'in such strange intricacies of thought, and peculiarities of expression, that we find considerable difficulty in discovering his meaning.' Unable to keep Mr. Hunt out he attributed this to Keats being 'a disciple in a school in which these peculiarities are virtues' and regretted that the young poet was 'sowing the seeds of disappointment where the fruit should be honour and distinction.'

He turned with relief to 'Hyperion,' a poem understandable because it was in the familiar Miltonic tradition. He quoted largely from it, putting the outstanding lines in italics. 'Isabella' he found 'the worst part of the volume,' thinking Barry Cornwall's version of the tale 'in some respects superior.' In the outburst against commercial profiteers in stanza XVI he found evidence of 'simplicity and affectation.'

It is both unprofitable and unjust to Procter (Barry Cornwall) to consider the comparative poetic merits of 'A Sicilian Story' and 'Isabella,' but it is useful to compare them in assessing the taste of the day. The volume to which Procter's poem gave a name went into two editions in 1820. The story is told smoothly and in a much more 'gentlemanly' manner. It was far easier and a safer version for a man to read aloud to his women-folk. The horror of the tale is hidden away. The ghost is 'a dim and waving shadow.' Isabella finds her lover's body above ground and cuts away, not the head, but the heart. The process is discreetly side-tracked in

. . . but wherefore ask  
How, tremblingly, she did her bloody task?

She buries the heart, not in a pot, but under a tree, under which she sits and weeps. When her brothers dig up the heart it is not like Lorenzo's head, 'vile with green and livid spot' but still perfect, for Isabella had embalmed it. The tree which before had grown magically, now withered away, and Isabella went, half-crazed, to live in a cave in the Gothick hermit tradition and was at length 'translated to a finer sphere.'

The reviewer found fault with Keats's selection of images as 'according to the tenets of that school of poetry' which held that 'any thing or object in nature is a fit material on which the poet may work, forgetting that poetry has a nature of its own, and that it is the destruction of its essence to level its high being with the triteness of every-day life.' Amazingly enough to the modern reader he gave as an example and as a mere *conchetto* :

Heard melodies are sweet, but those *unheard*  
Are sweeter ; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on ;  
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,  
Pipe to the spirit *ditties of no tone* :

'On Autumn' brought the 'reality of Nature more before our eyes than almost any description that we can remember,' and he quoted the whole poem. He ended by exhorting 'Mr. K.' to become 'somewhat less strikingly original. . . . We could then promise him a double portion of readers, and a reputation which, if he persist in his errors, he will never obtain.' But 'his writings present us with so many fine and striking ideas, or passages, that we shall always read his poems with great pleasure.'

*The Sun* reviewed the book on July 10th, beginning : 'There are few things more delightful than the perusal of a new Volume of beautiful Poetry. . . . This delight we have just experienced in a very eminent degree.' It quoted largely from 'Hyperion,' regarding it, even in its unfinished state, as 'the greatest effort of MR. KEATS' genius, and gives us reason to hope for something great from his pen.' No space was left for criticism of the other poems in the volume which 'are very various in style, but all of great merit.' "'Isabella" . . . is a specimen of beautiful simplicity and affecting tenderness' and of the shorter poems the 'Ode to a Nightingale' and 'On a Grecian Urn' were singled out.

The *Literary Chronicle* for July 29th gave an admonitory notice. The critic was disappointed in Mr. Keats for whom he 'had augured better things.' Mr. Keats must really abandon 'all acquaintance with our metropolitan poets.' He was lukewarm about the longer poems, though admitting that 'Lamia,' 'Isabella,' and 'The Eve of St. Agnes' had some fine passages in them. He ignored 'Hyperion.' 'Among the

minor poems, many of which possess considerable merit' he thought the best to be the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' which he quoted in full. In 'Bards of Passion and of Mirth,' which he also quoted, he found 'a pretty idea, happily expressed.' Let Mr. Keats, however, 'avoid all sickly affectation on the one hand, and unintelligible quaintness on the other. Let him avoid coining new words, and give us the English language as it is taught and written in the nineteenth century, and he will make considerable progress towards improvement.'

In August there appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* a critique, not only of the new volume but of the hitherto ignored *Endymion*, written by Jeffrey himself. Finding this poet, whom he had not ventured to defend against his powerful Tory rivals, now in a fair way to becoming famous he rather neatly took credit to himself by saying :

That imitation of our older writers, and especially of our older dramatists, to which we cannot help flattering ourselves that we have somewhat contributed, has brought on, as it were, a second spring in our poetry ;—and few of its blossoms are either more profuse of sweetness or richer in promise, than this which is now before us.

He 'had never happened to see either of these volumes till very lately.' This in the case of *Endymion* seems highly improbable in view of Keats's statement in a letter of September, 1819, that 'The Edinburgh review are affraid to touch upon my Poem . . . they do not like to condemn it and they will not praise it for fear—They are as shy of it as I should be of wearing a Quaker's hat.' He found 'The Cowardliness of the Edinburgh . . . worse than the abuse of the Quarterly.' From an entry in Parson Newton's diary for 1818 it would appear as if, at least in the north-west of England, the sale of the *Review* was dwindling, for some 'Ladies whiggishly inclined' complained that it had fallen off and said that many of their neighbours had exchanged it for the *Quarterly*. The *Edinburgh* for a time, perhaps, felt it had to step warily.

In his article Jeffrey concentrated on *Endymion*. He gave the outline of the story quoting copiously from the finer passages. He made a very fair criticism, though he admitted its beauties generously, adding that there was probably no other book 'we would sooner employ as a test to ascertain

whether any one had in him a native relish for poetry.' This was probably a side-hit at the *Quarterly* oracle, Croker. He had allowed himself too little space for much comment on the *Lamia* volume. He quoted with approbation from 'Isabella,' 'The Nightingale,' and 'Fancy.' He found in 'Hyperion' 'passages of force and grandeur,' but the subject of it 'too far removed from all the sources of human interest, to be successfully treated by any modern author.' Keats must not 'waste the good gifts of nature on intractable themes.'

On the publication of his articles in book form later Jeffrey expressed regret that he 'did not go more largely into the exposition' of Keats's merits 'in the slight notice of them.' Perhaps we must not blame too much a harassed and busy editor for not giving the young poet support when he most needed it.

Constable's *Edinburgh Magazine*, which had given what was on the whole a fair criticism of the 1817 volume, had ignored *Endymion*: it now also changed its mind. It had predicted in 1817 that if Keats would cast off the uncleanness of 'the Cockney School,' 'taking him by himself it appears he might succeed.' In spite of the many traces of that taint in *Endymion* the reviewer began his notice of it with 'Mr. Keats is a poet of high and undoubted powers.' He thought that *Endymion*, though it contained more positive faults than *Lamia*, 'is more completely in Mr. Keats's own style; and we think that it contains, at least, as many beauties.' He criticised little but quoted freely so that readers might taste for themselves for 'after all, poetry is a matter of feeling rather than of argument.' He singled out lines 'quoted against the author, in a London Review' (the *Quarterly*):

"Endymion! the cave is secreter  
 "Than the isle of Delos. Echo hence shall stir  
 "No sighs, but sigh-warm kisses, or *light noise*  
 "Of thy combing hand, the while it travelling cloy  
 "And trembles thro' my labyrinthine hair."

and finished the article with 'If this be not poetry, we do not know what is; but we must perforce leave *Endymion*, begging our readers to refer to it without more ado, both for their own sakes and our own.' The review on *Lamia* he promised for a later issue.

If Keats had any heart left in him now to value praise this notice must have pleased him. However far he had slipped from contact with the world, he could scarcely help, I think, being amused by the review of *Lamia* in the *British Critic*. Having made wilful nonsense of *Endymion* in a vulgar style the *Critic* had, in view of the recognised achievement of *Lamia*, to climb down and he did it with what dignity he could muster. He laid all the blame for his *Endymion* critique on that dreadful Mr. Leigh Hunt. He opened with 'If there be one person in the present day, for whom we feel an especial contempt, it is Mr. Examiner Hunt.' It was, of course, merely as a disciple of Hunt that 'Mr. Keats fell under our lash, so severely, upon the occasion of his poem of *Endymion*.' Upon recurring to that poem he was not unwilling to admit it some merit; at the first perusal he was not 'in a frame of mind to appreciate.' *Endymion* must have been 'corrected by our modern Malvolio, and projected by his advice and under his superintendence. . . . The effect of this upon Mr. Keats's poetry, was like an infusion of ipecacuanha powder in a dish of marmalade.' As there is in this new volume some measure of 'the same obstacle to dispassionate judgment' the reviewer congratulated himself on his impartiality.

He again, however, pursed a moral lip. The subject of one of the poems was drawn from the works of that notoriously immoral writer Boccaccio, and the other narrative poems had stories of similar doubtful character. But in the handling of them there were fortunately no details that might 'appear calculated to wound delicacy.'

'Mr. Keats is really a person of no ordinary genius' and if he will only take the *Critic's* advice and model himself on Spenser or Milton instead of Mr. Leigh Hunt 'he need not despair of attaining to a very high and enviable place in the public esteem.' A critic who failed to see the influence of Spenser and of Milton on Keats's work does not demand lengthy consideration: I shall pass over the rest of the review and merely give the spirited lunge with which he finished up his article. Giving examples of 'affectations' in the Huntian manners, several of which, to do him justice, might be so styled, he boomed:

such innovations in language are despicable in themselves, and disgusting to the imagination of every man of virtue and taste,



from having been originally *conceited*, as Mr. Keats would say, in the brain of one of the most profligate and wretched scribblers that we can remember to have even either heard or read of.

The 'profligate and wretched scribbler' published his review of *Lamia* in the *Indicator* for August 2nd and 9th. The article is neither so rich nor so gracefully written as the 1817 review of the *Poems*; perhaps the fine point of Hunt's pen was blunted by heavy anxiety for his friend. He adopted the method of telling the story of each of the long poems 'cutting some of the richest passages out of (Keats's) verse, and fitting them in to our plainer narrative. They are such as would leaven a much greater lump. Their drops are rich and vital, the essence of a heap of fertile thoughts.' Of

A haunting music, sole perhaps and lone  
Supportress of the faery-roof, made moan  
Throughout, as fearful the whole charm might fade.

he said: 'This is the very quintessence of the romantic.' He found fault in '*Lamia*' with

the common-place of supposing that Apollonius's sophistry must always prevail, and that modern experiment has done a deadly thing to poetry by discovering the nature of the rainbow, the air, etc.: that is to say, that the knowledge of natural history and physics, by shewing us the nature of things, does away the imaginations that once adorned them. This is a condescension to a learned vulgarity, which so excellent a poet as Mr. Keats ought not to have made. The world will always have fine poetry, as long as it has events, passions, affections, and a philosophy that sees deeper than this philosophy.

With regard to '*Isabella*' he said, no doubt with his friend Lamb in mind: 'The following masterly anticipation of his (Lorenzo's) end, conveyed in a single word, has been justly admired:

So the two brothers and their *murder'd* man, etc.

He criticised Keats's temporary failure of dramatic sense in putting in the mouth of one of the sordid brothers the exquisite metaphor:

. . . ere the hot sun count  
His dewy rosary on the eglantine.

He quoted, remarking on their 'fervid misery,' the stanzas praised by Lamb, XLVI-VIII, and also with strong

approbation the last heart-rending nineteen lines of the poem.

'The Eve of St. Agnes,' wrote Hunt, 'is rather a picture than a story' and quoting the stanzas singled out by Lamb, XXIV-VII, 'The description . . . falls at once gorgeously and delicately upon us, like the colours of a painted glass.'

'When Mr. Keats errs in his poetry, it is from the ill management of a good thing—exuberance of ideas.' As an example of this he gave from the 'Ode to Psyche' the line :

At tender eye-dawn of aurean love

adding, 'it is once or twice only, in his present volume.'

He quoted the 'Ode to a Nightingale' in full. Of it he said :

The poem will be the more striking to the reader, when he understands what we take a friend's liberty in telling him, that the author's powerful mind has for some time past been inhabiting a sickened and shaken body, and that in the mean while it has had to contend with feelings that make a fine nature ache for its species, even when it would disdain to do so for itself; we mean, critical malignity, that unhappy envy, which would wreak its own tortures upon others, especially upon those that really feel for it already.

This personal touch would not be pleasing to Keats; nor, I should imagine, could he feel anything but disgust for the extraordinary statement from Hunt that almost all the poems in the present volume were written four years ago, when the author was but twenty. One cannot, however one might wish to defend Hunt, regard this as anything but a journalistic disingenuousness (to use an euphemism for a lie) to advertise the poems. Hunt could not, for all his natural disregard for mundane facts, have been unaware of the rough dating of most of the poems. He could not have thought they could be contemporary with the 1817 volume.

'The Hyperion,' he wrote, 'is a fragment—a gigantic one, like a ruin in a desert, or the bones of a mastodon.' He quoted from it largely, including that great utterance we can link with the idea perceived in Keats's letters of a strong, serene power looking down :

Now comes the pain of truth, to whom 'tis pain;  
O folly! for to bear all naked truths,  
And to envisage circumstance, all calm,  
That is the top of sovereignty.

He gave as 'the core and inner diamond of the poem' Book I, lines 176-304, creating the fiery beauty of the Sun-god's palace 'whose portals open like a rose, the awful phenomena that announce a change in heaven, and his inability to bid the day break as he was accustomed.' He made the valuable suggestion that Keats had left 'Hyperion' unfinished because 'our feeble tongue' cannot convey 'that large utterance of the early Gods.' Milton had failed in a like attempt and, according to Pope, had made

God the father turn a school divine.

The moment the God speaks, we forget that they do not speak like ourselves. The fact is, they feel like ourselves; and the poet would have to make them feel otherwise, even if he could make them speak otherwise, which he cannot, unless he venture upon an obscurity which would destroy our sympathy: and what is sympathy with a God, but turning him into a man? We allow, that superiority and inferiority are, after all, human terms, and imply something not so truly fine and noble as the levelling of a great sympathy and love; but poems of the present nature, like *Paradise Lost*, assume a different principle; and fortunately perhaps, it is one which it is impossible to reconcile with the other.

This is interesting not only as general criticism but as perhaps indicative of some part of Keats's motive in not completing 'Hyperion.' The Titans are huge figures and speak greatly but they speak in grief which is in itself great. The words of the commonest man in sorrow can be natural poetry. About Hyperion himself there is a splendid pall of tragedy. The handling of Apollo, the coming sun-god, is weaker and his speech almost commonplace in such lines as:

". . . Point me out the way  
 "To any one particular beauteous star,  
 "And I will flit into it with my lyre,  
 "And make its silvery splendour pant with bliss."

Faltering human nature cannot depict a potent god. Dante saw God as supreme light and not personified and the Trinity in three circles; in so far as he could put his beatitude in human terms.

The critique ended:

The author's versification is now perfected, the exuberances of his imagination restrained, and a calm power, the surest and loftiest

of all power, takes place of the impatient workings of the younger god within him. The character of his genius is that of energy and voluptuousness, each able at will to take leave of the other, and possessing, in their union, a high feeling of humanity not common to the best authors who can less combine them. Mr. Keats undoubtedly takes his seat with the oldest and best of our living poets.

Keats was now an established poet. He wrote on August 20th to Brown: 'My book has had good success among the literary people.' The critiques mentioned above he must have read; those which came out in September may have missed him; the magazines were then dilatory in their appearance and he left London on September 17th. It would be a pity if he did not see the *New Monthly* for its praise of the volume showed clearly which way the wind was blowing. It was a Tory Review owned by Colburn, the publisher (an ancestor of Hurst and Blackett) and edited officially by the poet, Thomas Campbell. The reviewer said of the poems:

There is a fine freeness of touch about them, like that which is manifest in the old marbles, as though the poet played at will his fancies virginal and produced his most perfect works without toil . . . his latest works (are) as free from all offensive peculiarities—as pure, as genuine, and as lofty, as the severest critic could desire.

Of 'Lamia' he wrote:

There is in this poem a mingling of Greek majesty with fairy luxuriance which we have not elsewhere seen. The fair shapes stand clear in their antique beauty, encircled with the profuse magnificence of romance, and in the thick atmosphere of its golden lustre.

and of 'Hyperion,' 'we do not think anything exceeds in silent grandeur the opening of the poem' and quoting Book II, lines 5-81, 'The picture of the vast abode of Cybele and the Titans—and of its gigantic inhabitants, is in the sublimest style of Æschylus.' He noted 'the gigantic stride he (Keats) has taken' and predicted 'an exalted and lasting station among the English poets.'

The *Monthly Magazine or British Register* gave a short notice. Keats, the reviewer felt, was now 'entitled to stand equally high in the estimation of public opinion' as Hunt

or B. W. Procter. He possessed 'the faults characteristic of his school' but there was in him 'more reach of poetic capacity, more depth and intenseness of thought and feeling, with more classical power and expression' than in Procter and more originality than in either poet.

The reviewer in the *London Magazine*, now edited by John Scott, former editor of *The Champion*, opened with a long castigation of the *Quarterly*, though admitting that Keats had in some measure courted its attack by his imprudence in obtruding his political views in his work and by youthful 'affectations.' He criticised on this score the stanzas attacking the brothers of Isabella, adding: 'That most beautiful Paper . . . in our last number, on the "ledger-men" of the South Sea House, is an elegant reproof of such short-sighted views of character; such idle hostilities against the realities of life. The author of *Endymion* and *Hyperion* must delight in that Paper.' The paper referred to was Charles Lamb's 'The South Sea House.' If Mr. Keats must protest against the materialism of the age let him do it in the 'bold and indignant style of Wordsworth's sonnet.' The reviewer then quoted in full 'The world is too much with us.' In this peroration there are hints of John Scott's hostility to Hunt: Scott was but a mild Liberal and regarded the editor of *The Examiner* as a mischievous fellow.

Quoting the last two stanzas of the 'Nightingale' he said: 'It is distinct, noble, pathetic and true; the thoughts have all chords of direct communication with naturally-constituted hearts: the echoes of the strain linger about the depths of human bosoms.' Giving stanzas XXIII-IX of 'The Eve of St. Agnes' he wrote:

Let us take a passage of another sort altogether—the description of a young beauty preparing for her nightly rest, overlooked by a concealed lover, in which we know not whether most to admire the magical delicacy of the hazardous picture, or its consummate, irresistible attraction. "How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank," says Shakespeare; and sweetly indeed does it fall on the half-dressed form of Madeline: it has an exquisite moral influence, corresponding with its picturesque effect.

'Hyperion' he found 'one of the most extraordinary creations of any modern imagination' and he got in another slap at the *Quarterly* in

The sorrows of this piece are "huge", its utterances "large"; its tears "big".—Alas, centuries have brought littleness since then,—otherwise a crawling, reptile of office, with just strength enough to leave its slimy traces on the pages of a fashionable Review, could never have done a real mischief to the poet of the Titans! . . . "*the reception given to that work (Endymion) discouraged the author from proceeding.*"

Let Mr. Croker read the following sublime and gorgeous personification of Asia, and be proud of the information thus given him—and of that superior encouragement to which it is owing that we have his Talevera in a complete state!

He then quoted Book II, lines 52–63 of 'Hyperion'. This, if written by John Scott himself, has a pathos for modern readers for in the following year, a week before Keats's death, he was killed in a duel with Christie, the friend of Lockhart of *Blackwood's*, as a result of his constant reprisals on the Tory organs for their unjust treatment of Liberal writers.

Towards the end of the review there was a concentrated dose of criticism, pointing out 'the principal faults' that impeded Keats's popularity. One fault was 'obscurity and confusion of language', and as an example of 'confusion' he cited 'the epithet of "leaden-eyed" to despair, considered as a quality or sentiment.' That the old habit of personification in poetry still shackled the minds of many is clear in 'Were it a personification of despair the compound would be as finely applied, as, under the actual circumstances, it is erroneously so.' The second fault was Keats's fondness for 'running out glimmerings of thought and indicating distant shadowy fancies . . . plain earnest minds turn away from such tricks with disgust.' The third was 'a quaint strangeness of phrase; as some folk affect an odd manner of arranging their neckcloths, etc.' He objected to Mr. Keats talking of *cutting mercy with a sharp knife to the bone*; 'we cannot contemplate the *skeleton of mercy*.' He put on a level with this razor-sharp metaphor the periphrasis, too coy perhaps for its context, 'the dainties made to still an infant's cries.'

But the reviewer is tired of criticism. 'Let us,' he said, 'then turn together to the book itself . . . we shall there find what it will be our delight to enjoy.'

The ascetic nonconformist *Eclectic Review* had in 1817 warned Mr. Keats against the frivolity of poetry in relation to

the serious business of life : ' When a man has established his character in any useful sphere of exertion, the fame of a poet may be safely sought.' Now, as then, it acknowledged Mr. Keats to be ' a young man possessed of an elegant fancy, a warm and lively imagination, and something above the average talent of persons who take to writing poetry,' but warned him against the snare of imagination and the delusion of poetry for its own sake, ' poetry, after all, if pursued as an end, is but child's play.'

The *Edinburgh Magazine* continued its review<sup>1</sup> of Keats's poems in October. The critic contented himself with presenting Keats's poetry in lavish quotation but with little comment. 'Isabella' he found 'eminently beautiful'; in 'The Eve of St. Agnes' he quoted the set of stanzas chosen for special notice by other reviewers. He was inclined to prefer the 'Nightingale' to any other poem in the book. 'We have read this ode over and over again, and every time with increased delight.' He quoted all but the first and last verse. 'Hyperion' he did not like as much as the other poems, 'yet there is an air of grandeur about it, and it opens in a striking manner.' Of the line

Sat grey-haired Saturn, quiet as a stone

he said that it reminded him of a line in the *Mirror for Magistrates* :

By him lay heavie sleep, cosen of death,  
Flat on the ground, and *still as any stone* ;

and also of a line in Chaucer. Perhaps the line he meant was from 'The Complaynte unto Pite' :

Adoun I fel, when that I saugh the herse,  
*Dead as a stoon*, whyl that the swogh me laste.

The only criticism he had to make was of the tirade against Isabella's brothers as in bad taste, but even this he palliated with : 'Mr. K., indeed, himself seems to have some doubts of this, and in the following beautiful stanzas intreats the forgiveness of his master. They are enough, to say the least, to wipe away the sin committed.' He quoted the invocation to Boccaccio, stanzas XIX and XX.

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Willard B. Pope suggests this review was written by John Hamilton Reynolds.

Following directly on this review is a set of couplets entitled 'Dian and Endymion' and signed I. R. or J. R. (the letter is worn). They are of little value in themselves but are full of remote but unmistakable Keatsian echoes. It would be of interest to know the name of the author. One may guess he was a Scot as in the first couplet he rimes 'Endymion' with 'mūn' (moon).

There were no reviews from *Blackwood's* and the *Quarterly*. On August 31st Mr. Blackwood called on Taylor in Fleet Street. Taylor, after a general chat upon books, told him they had published another volume of Keats's for his editors to make merry with. Blackwood said they were disposed to speak favourably of Mr. Keats this time. He had expected an article on *Lamia* to appear in the August issue. Taylor exclaimed against their inconsistency; how could they praise Keats after they had denied talent to him? Blackwood asserted that formerly they had felt bound to find fault but that now they could praise.

"But why," asked Taylor, "did you attack him personally?" This Mr. Blackwood had the impudence to deny. When Taylor pressed the question home with examples of *Blackwood's* abuse of Keats, Mr. Blackwood said airily: O that! that was only a joke. The writer certainly found affectation in Keats's poetry and said so. 'It was done in the fair spirit of criticism.' Taylor lost his temper.

"It was done in the spirit of the Devil, Mr. Blackwood. So if a young man is guilty of affectation while he is walking the streets it is fair in another person because he dislikes it to come and knock him down."

"No," answered Blackwood, "but a poet challenges public opinion by printing his book, but I suppose you would have them not criticised at all?"

Taylor who privately loathed professional criticism could not answer directly to this but replied that he thought an unsuccessful poet was punished enough in the neglect of his work, and it "seems very cruel to abuse a man merely because he cannot give us as much pleasure as he wishes. But you go beyond this—you strike a man when he is down. He gets a violent blow from the *Quarterly*—and then you begin."

"I beg your pardon," said Blackwood coolly, "we were the first."



It must have been difficult for Taylor to keep control of himself. But he remained cool enough to get in a subtle thrust by a reference to the manners of gentlemen and an enquiry whether these should not regulate a man's conduct in writing as well as in personal intercourse. No man would insult Mr. Keats as 'Z' had done in his company and 'Z's' attack was the baser for being anonymous; he ran no personal risk such as a man who insulted another in person did in those days when duelling still lingered on. Taylor continued :

"I feel regard for Mr. Keats as a man of real genius, a gentleman, nay more, one of the gentlest of human beings. He does not resent these things himself, he merely says of his opponents, 'They don't know me.'"

But Mr. Blackwood was not a man to be moved by this. Taylor went on in a firmer tone :

"I am happy to say that public interest is awakened to the sense of the injustice which has been done him and the attempts to ruin him will have in the end a contrary effect."

They talked about Scott's new book, *Ivanhoe*, for another ten minutes and then Mr. Blackwood took his leave with a formal bow and a good morning. On arrival he had shaken hands.

All this Taylor wrote down and sent in a letter to Hessey. He feared there might be allusion to it in 'The Mother of Mischief' and wanted to keep the conversation clear before him.

In a September critique of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, *Blackwood's* made a half-apologetic reference to Keats. They were sorry to hear he was ill and wished him a speedy recovery. Mr. Keats's friends attributed his illness in great part to their castigation of *Endymion*. If this were so they expressed regret; if they had suspected the author 'of being so delicately nerved, we should have administered our reproof in a much more lenient shape and style.' Of course, they recognised all along Mr. Keats's promise of being 'a real poet in England' if he would forswear the 'Cockney School' and 'the thin potations of Mr. Leigh Hunt. We, therefore, rated him as roundly as we decently could do. . . .' Allowing for the coarser tone of Georgian journalism what, one wonders, would 'Z' regard as indecent criticism? The editors evi-

dently regarded their medical jokes as 'decent' for, after in this article saying, although they saw more beauties in Keats's present volume, there were still the old 'Cockney' faults, they put in the same number of the magazine a rimed sneer at the 'School' including :

We, from the hands of a cockney apothecary  
Brought off this pestle, with which he was capering,  
Swearing and swaggering, rhyming and vapouring ;  
Seized with a fit of poetical fury . . .  
Loud he exclaimed, ' Behold here's my truncheon ;  
I'm the Marshal of poets—I'll flatten your nuncheon.  
Pitch physic to hell, you rascals, for damn ye, a—  
I'll physic you all with a clyster of *Lamia*.

In justice to Blackwood it must be said that he himself would not have handled this dirt ; he does not seem to have been forceful enough to restrain Lockhart and Wilson. John Murray, at first connected with *Blackwood's Magazine*, had soon withdrawn himself in strong protest.

It is a tribute to Murray's common sense and fairness that he did not launch an attack on Keats's new volume in the *Quarterly* for Lord Byron, on receiving a copy of *Lamia*, wrote : ' Pray send me *no more* poetry but what is rare and decidedly good.' Referring to the volume as 'trash' he exhorted Murray to 'flay him alive ; if some of you don't I must skin him myself ; there is no bearing the drivelling idiotism of the Mankin.' When he read Jeffrey's praise of Keats's poetry in the *Edinburgh Review* he wrote to Murray shriekingly and in such gross terms that even modern editors feel compelled to use asterisks. He had originally fallen foul of Keats for his youthful attack on Pope in the 1817 volume. Byron was at this time the most popular poet in Europe and both as man and poet a dominant figure, a rage, a fashion, almost a tradition. He was highly profitable to his publisher. In remaining silent about Keats, therefore, in the *Review* he owned, Murray showed not only admirable discretion but considerable courage.

It is unlikely that Keats himself knew of *Blackwood's* further attack or of the noble lord's filthy abuse ; all he knew of important reactions to his new volume was that, in spite of minor criticisms, he was unanimously hailed by the critics he had read as a true poet. This he had always known but

in early days when a love of fame animated him recognition would have been dear. Now a greater love and its loss in the shadow of the valley of death possessed him. Ambition could not touch him. His greatest work was but the forerunner of what was to come if health had been given to him ; only a slight preparation for his ancient lofty dreams. What man had said and what man could say was no comfort in the coldness of his despair.



JOHN KEATS  
From a drawing by Charles Brown.



## CHAPTER XX

### *The Voyage to Italy (September–November 1820)*

THE FAVOURABLE RECEPTION OF HIS BOOK IN LITERARY circles, Tory and Liberal, aroused outside his immediate circle a new interest in Keats. It is likely that he received many invitations which, both from ill-health and disinclination, he refused. One, however, from Horace Smith he did accept and it was, so far as we know, the last engagement he fulfilled. He spent the day with Smith at his house in Elysium Row, Fulham, then in the midst of open country, nursery gardens and orchards. During the afternoon Smith took his little daughter into the garden and drew her attention to ‘a rather thin, pale and ill-dressed gentleman’ sitting in the shade of a wide-spreading ilex tree.

“Do you see that man?” he said, “that’s a poet.”

The familiars of his circle came to dine at an earlier hour than usual so that they might enjoy a long evening out of doors in exceptionally beautiful weather. James and Leonard Smith were there and also the ‘literary dry-salter,’ Thomas Hill of Sydenham. Hill had been allowed as an especial favour by his host to send over in Keats’s honour a dozen of his favourite beverage, ‘some quite undeniable *Chateau Margeaux*’ and this was enjoyed in the garden.

As the weeks drew on towards the shorter days the thought of the voyage to Italy weighed more and more on Keats’s mind. ‘This Journey,’ he wrote to Taylor on August 14th, ‘wakes me at daylight every morning and haunts me horribly. I shall endeavour to go through it with the sensation of marching up against a Battery.’ The financial aspect was worrying him. There was no money forthcoming from either George or Abbey. In his desperation he swallowed his pride and asked Mr. Abbey for a loan.<sup>1</sup> Abbey wrote to him formally: ‘You know that it was very much against my will that you lent your money to George. . . . Bad debts for the

<sup>1</sup> Which had apparently been promised—see letter in Appendix.

last two years have cut down the profits of our business to nothing, so that I can scarcely take out enough for my private expence—It is therefore not in my power to lend you any thing—I am Dear Sir Yrs—Rich<sup>d</sup> Abbey. When you are able to call I shall be glad to see you, as I should not like to see you want “maintenance for the day.”

In a further letter to Taylor about the voyage Keats enclosed without comment a note of how he wished to dispose of his property after death; the property which beyond his books lay ‘in the hopes of the sale of books publish’d or unpublish’d.’ Brown and Taylor were to be ‘first paid Creditors—the rest in nubibus—but in case it should shower pay my Taylor the few pounds I owe him. My Chest of Books divide among my friends.’

On the 20th he wrote to Brown in Scotland telling him that a winter in Italy was his only chance of living. ‘Not that I have any great hopes of that for, I think, there is a core of disease in me not easy to pull out.’ The letter as we have it is incomplete but we may guess that he asked Brown to accompany him. He wrote again to Brown: ‘. . . I ought to be off at the end of this week, as the cold winds begin to blow towards evening;—but I will wait till I have your answer to this. I am to be introduced, before I set out, to a Dr Clark, a physician settled at Rome, who promises to befriend me in every way there. The sale of my book is very slow though it has been very highly rated. One of the causes I understand from different quarters, of the unpopularity of this new book, and the others also, is the offence the ladies take at me. On thinking that matter over, I am certain I have said nothing in a spirit to displease any woman I would care to please; but still there is a tendency to class women in my books with roses and sweetmeats,—they never see themselves dominant . . . I will say no more, but, waiting in anxiety for your answer, doff my hat, and make a purse as long as I can.’ These letters did not reach Brown in time so that Keats set out on his last journey without a word from him.

The thought of going alone to Italy must have added a fresh load to the burden of his misery. When Haydon saw him for the last time in Wentworth Place he was ‘lying in white bed with a book, hectic and on his back, irritable at his weakness and wounded at the way he had been used. H

seemed to be going out of life with a contempt for this world and no hopes of the other. I told him to be calm, but he muttered that if he did not soon get better he would destroy himself. I used to reason against such violence, but it was no use ; he grew angry, and I went away deeply affected.'

In all Haydon's accounts of Keats a large allowance must be made for exaggeration and even misrepresentation. This passage follows on a reference to Keats's 'irregularities' which from the testimony of more reliable witnesses we know to be slander. But there seems to be a fairly general agreement that his diseased mind now brooded on the former attacks on him in *Blackwood's* and the *Quarterly*. He would pore over them when alone, and he would, as soon as anyone entered the room, thrust them aside and begin to talk of some other matter but his misery was apparent. He is reported by Woodhouse to have said : "If I die you must ruin Lockhart." His friends, however, mistook a symptom for a cause. None but Brown could guess at the depth of his love for Fanny and probably nobody at this time understood the effect of his terrible disease upon the mind : so that after his death far too great a stress was put upon the disastrous effect of the attacks upon him. It was also a convenient stick to lay about the shoulders of the Tories.

Haydon's account also exaggerates his weakness of body. A man who could face and survive a voyage to Italy under the hard conditions of that day must still have been tolerably active. There must have been in these last summer days many walks on the Heath with his love, the boisterous Carlo running and leaping before them ; walks in which he snatched desperately at vanishing joy. But the thought of that terrible journey could never have been far from his mind.

At the beginning of September the cold winds of evening made it clear that the time had come for Keats to go. There was still no sign from Brown and any thought of his accompanying Keats must be abandoned. Fanny wanted to go with him as his wife and Mrs. Brawne agreed saying she would go too. Keats must have been sorely tempted but in honour he felt bound to refuse. It would seem as if some outside persons offered officious advice on the subject which Fanny thought had swayed his decision. From her enmity to them in after years it would appear as if the Reynolds



women were the offenders. But Keats would scarcely need prompting. He could not subject his love to the agony of a deathbed which his medical experience enabled him to realise in its painful detail. His common sense would tell him that from the mother, too, he would be exacting much; she would leave her young boy and girl behind her and strain her financial resources which were, so far as we can gather, not large. She herself was willing for love of Keats and her daughter to put these difficulties aside but he would not permit her. In face of his definite refusal the two women put as cheerful a face on it as possible. They talked of his return next summer, of an immediate marriage and life together at Wentworth Place. 'Had he returned,' Fanny wrote to his sister in the March of 1821, 'I should have been his wife and he would have lived with us.'

The money difficulty was smoothed away by Taylor. He bought from Keats the copyright of *Lamia* for a hundred pounds which, when moneys owing on advances made where deducted, left Keats thirty pounds with which to make preparation. One hundred pounds had been owing for advances on *Endymion* but this Taylor cancelled in exchange for the copyright. He also arranged a credit over in Italy for one hundred and fifty pounds. All this was done when capital was very short with Taylor and trade exceptionally bad. The credit was to be set against money expected from George; probably the two hundred pounds he mentioned in a letter of June 18th to his brother and which he had hoped to send off almost immediately. Taylor, however, must have known he was running a risk of having to meet the credit in full himself for Keats had no faith in George's ability to send him money nor, indeed, had he much confidence in his brother as a man of business.

Arrangements were made for Keats to sail in the *Maria Crowther*, a brig of one hundred and thirty tons, due to leave London on or about the 17th. It seemed as if he would have to go alone.

The kindly Haslam was now a married man with a child either born or expected but this had not lessened his affection and solicitude for Keats. 'If I know what it is to love,' he wrote to Severn in Italy, 'I truly love John Keats.' He could not bear the contemplation of the solitary journey and of his

friend possibly dying unknown and uncared for in a foreign land. Casting about in his mind for a companion for him he thought of Severn. He was not perhaps the best man to go for he was inexperienced of life, lacking in self-confidence and to a great extent dominated by Keats. The older, strong-willed and worldly Brown was the man but he had vanished in the north.

Severn had seen very little of his friend since June. His leisure was always woefully meagre and the summer daylight must have meant even longer painting hours. He did not apparently know that the Italian journey was now a settled thing. He had thought his friend to be improving in health under the care of Mrs. Brawne. One evening in early September as he sat at work in his town lodgings Haslam called. After telling Severn the situation in regard to Keats he said : " Will you go ? " Unhesitatingly, though the prospect must have been alarming to the modest, home-keeping youth, Severn answered : " I'll go."

Consideration and discussion soon led him to see that a winter in Rome might materially benefit him. As winner of the Academy's gold medal he could apply for their travelling scholarship. It was at this time the dream of every painter to go to Rome and a picture from there might obtain for him the coveted income of one hundred and thirty pounds for three years, with consequent leisure to paint what he liked and to see life outside his own country. But no one can doubt that if, on the other hand, there had been nothing in prospect for Severn he would have gone. His friend needed him and that was enough. As things were he was throwing up a certain livelihood attained after years of struggle. He had no capital and but for a timely payment of twenty-five pounds for a miniature ' of a lady in a white satin bonnet and feathers ' he could not have gone at all or would have gone on borrowed money. He had to face the fury of a father who was already angry with him for wishing to throw up a hard-won connection as miniaturist for the uncertain career of an historical painter.

Severn's memory, never good, became increasingly unreliable as he grew older. In varying accounts of this time he gave twenty-four hours and three days as the period in which he had to make preparation for the journey. The three days are generally accepted as the more likely. They were days of

continual rush that gave him little time for thought. He had to go out to Hoxton to see his family, to make purchases, apply for his passport and visit Sir Thomas Lawrence in order to get introductions in Rome. She whom he called his 'angel-mother' fully sympathised and undertook, with his sisters, to get his trunk ready. His father would do nothing but make him miserable by reproaches. He was a tyrant and a man of uncertain temper but Severn loved him as he loved all his family. The parting from the adored mother, brothers and sisters was hard enough without the anger of his father; justifiable anger perhaps in the circumstances. Mr. Severn had a great love for his eldest son and could not be expected to see in a friend a prior claim over his son's own family and his prospects for the future. He resorted in his despair to reasoning but Severn, as he said of himself, had 'the virtue of the donkey—obstinacy—in the highest degree.'

In the meantime Keats was with Taylor in Fleet Street awaiting the day when the *Maria Crowther* might be ready and able to depart. The last painful good-byes were said at Wentworth Place on the 13th. Keats left with Fanny a message for his sister exhorting her to avoid colds and coughs and never to go out of the greenhouse into the cold air. He asked Fanny to correspond with her and to give her a lock of his hair. Apparently Abbey was no more willing to allow his ward to visit him than he had been in the case of the dying Tom. His hatred of the Hampstead circle seems to have been almost a mania. A year passed before Fanny was able by persistence and diplomacy to meet Fanny Keats and in the meantime their correspondence had to be conducted in secret.

While they were together in Fleet Street, Taylor set down on paper the business relations between Keats and his firm; though they were so materially to Keats's benefit that they might be more truly termed friendly relations. Taylor and Hessey proposed in the case of any future work, and also with regard to the *Poems*, *Endymion* and *Lamia*, the copyrights of which they had bought, to hand over to him all clear profit and to bear the burden of losses that could not be made good. Both men had strong faith in Keats and felt that to publish for him would bring honour to their house but even this advantage was, in the state of his health, at best, problematical. The only material gain was the copyrights of the two books

which might be of high value in future. By the middle of the century they were of considerable value but they had been sold to Moxon for a small sum. It was Moxon, not Taylor and Hessey, who reaped the harvest.

It was midnight on the 16th when Severn reached home to take a final farewell of his family. He found his father 'sunk down in extreme grief in his armchair.' His trunk, a heavy one, stood in the room. Joseph and Tom Severn had difficulty in lifting it for conveyance to the carriage outside and Joseph was forced to ask his father to help. 'He rose up in an apparent passion of madness, and swore that if without his touching it the trunk was never to be lifted at all, it should not be touched by him.' Severn said nothing but turned to go upstairs to take leave of his youngest brother. His father rose and stood in the doorway and when his son attempted to pass him he knocked him down. Tom Severn, although nineteen and a powerful young man, had to be assisted in holding back the unhappy, tormented father while his son passed through. There was no time for remonstrance or reconciliation. Severn had to go leaving sorrow and violence behind him.

Tom was to accompany him as far as Gravesend. On the slow horse-journey through the dark and chill of night the two brothers were wrapped in gloom. Severn was, in addition to a natural distress of mind over the painful scene with his father, suffering from a liver complaint. But as they came near the south bank of the Thames with the wharves and masts looming against the pale dawn his spirits rose. A new life lay before him and he would be with the friend he loved most.

Keats was waiting for him on the wharf with Taylor, Haslam, Woodhouse and others. Taylor had with him his apprentice William Smith Williams who was later to become reader to Smith Elder and a friend of the Brontës. Perhaps it was he who as 'Gaston' contributed to Hone's *Table Book* in 1827 some verses on Keats in which are the following lines :

Still do I see thee on the river's strand  
Take thy last step upon thy native land—  
Still feel the last kind pressure of thy hand.  
A calm dejection in thy youthful face,  
To which e'en sickness lent a tender grace—  
A hectic bloom—the sacrificial flower  
Which marks the approach of Death's all-withering power.

The *Maria Crowther* sailed out of the London Docks at 7 o'clock. Taylor, Woodhouse, Haslam and Tom Severn remained on board her. On the way down river, Severn, always careless of detail and possibly remembering it for the first time, said that his passport had not arrived before he left. Haslam undertook to procure it and let him have it before the ship left Gravesend.

The little company of friends, used though they were in their generation to discomfort in travelling, must have felt misgiving when they inspected the travellers' quarters. The *Maria Crowther* was a small brig with but one cabin which it seems as if the Captain shared with the passengers. A woman had come on board with them, a Mrs. Pidgeon, a cheerful middle-aged woman to whom fortunately Keats and Severn took an immediate fancy. She too had to share the cabin 'with only a side-scene to retire to.'

The ship reached Gravesend about noon and waited for another passenger. The friends remained with Keats and Severn until four o'clock. I now quote from a letter Taylor wrote at her brother's request to Fanny Keats :

He did not go ashore but entered at once on the kind of life which he will have to lead for about a Month to come, dining in the Cabin with the Captain, and another Passenger (a Lady) besides Severn, the Friend who is gone with him—The Vessel waited at Gravesend for another Lady who was coming on board there.—Mr. Taylor, Mr. Haslam and Mr. Woodhouse accompanied Mr. Keats to Gravesend, and left him at four o'clock on Sunday afternoon.—He was then comfortably settled in his new Habitation with every prospect of having a pleasant Voyage.—His Health was already much improved by the Air of the River, by the Exercise and the amusement which the Sailing afforded.—He was provided with everything that would contribute to make the Time pass agreeably, and with all that his Health required ;

This was a rosy picture for Fanny's benefit. The ship was not only ill-equipped, but badly provisioned.

When Haslam took farewell of Severn he made an earnest request that he would write journal-letters of their life on the voyage and abroad for the benefit of Keats's friends. It is from these letters, together with others written at the time, that we can obtain the most reliable details of Severn's life with Keats. It was perhaps now that Woodhouse handed to

Keats a generously-worded letter saying that, though at present he was short of money, it would give him great satisfaction later to answer a draft of his for 'there is no one who would be more welcome than yourself to share my little Superfluities.' He asked for a lock of his friend's hair. It was arranged that Haslam should call on Fanny Keats to give her a personal account of her brother's departure. Two of the men wrote immediately to Fanny Brawne reporting that Keats's health and spirits were better than they had expected.

Before the friends parted, Keats wrote a short note :

The passport arrived before we started. I dont think I shall be long ill. God bless you—farewell.

JOHN KEATS.

That evening at tea in the cabin he 'cracked his jokes' and was quite the 'special fellow of olden times.' Fortunately sleep soon overcame to quench these unnaturally high spirits. He and Severn 'serenaded' Mrs. Pidgeon 'with a snoring duett.' Severn woke up several times 'with the oddest notions—the first time in a Shoemaker's shop—the next down in a wine cellar pretty well half seas over.'

While they slept that night a small coasting vessel glided into the harbour and anchored nearly alongside the gently rocking ship. She had come from Dundee with a passenger aboard her. That passenger was Charles Brown. At day-break, long before Keats and Severn came on deck, she had weighed anchor and sailed up-river on the incoming tide. Fate had been unkind enough to Keats; this last cruel jest, not yet complete, would seem an unnecessary cruelty.

When Brown had at length received Keats's despondent letters he went on board the first boat that presented itself. Now, when he might have spent at least a day with his friend he was waiting impatiently on the deck of the coaster for its arrival at the wharf so that he might hurry to him at Hampstead.

The Captain, Thomas Walsh, the travellers found to be 'a good fellow' and anxious to make them as comfortable and happy as possible. After breakfast he and Severn went ashore to do some shopping. They bought, among other

provisions, apples and biscuits. The Captain tried to get a goat to provide milk for Keats, but was unsuccessful. On Keats's particular instructions Severn obtained 'some things from the Chymists.'

At dinner that afternoon Keats was 'full of his waggy—looked well—ate well—and was well.'

At six o'clock Severn's passport arrived and soon after the fourth passenger came on board. She was a Miss Cotterell, a pretty gentle girl, 'very lady-like—but a sad martyr.' She was also a consumptive going in search of winter warmth and sunshine. She was naturally very depressed at the prospect of the lonely voyage. The two young men did their best to cheer her. Severn tried hard to keep up with Keats in a light play of puns and joking, but, he said, 'my wit would have dropped in a minute but for Keats plying me—but I was done up for all that—leaving him sole master—but I struck up again in my own language or Keats would have borne the Lady off in triumph.' He was tired out and a bad colour from incipient sea-sickness and the liver trouble. A woman friend come to see Miss Cotterell off enquired which was the dying man.

Severn was 'destined to pass some weeks in sad penance.' His 'dinner was a matter that always came to light.' But throughout the voyage he remained resolutely cheerful, 'made puddings and sketches' and tended the invalids. With Keats's usual ill-luck they were detained in the Channel by adverse winds for a fortnight beating up and down distressfully and obliged to put in at various points. Miss Cotterell was terribly ill and continually fainted away. She craved for air and wanted the port-holes kept open. If the windows remained open for long Keats would start to cough violently and sometimes bring up blood. When they were closed Miss Cotterell fainted and would often remain insensible for five or six hours together. Mrs. Pidgeon, a woman of only surface good nature, was disobliging and worse than useless in regard to Miss Cotterell. Severn had to apply restoratives while Keats from his bunk 'dictated surgically like Esculapius of old in basso-relievo.'

On the 19th they were off Dover Castle. The sea was rough and Keats, good sailor though he was, was sick, but 'in a most gentlemanly manner.' At night they were all too

ill to take off their clothes and they slept in them. On the 20th they were off Brighton, on a beautiful morning, and were able to breakfast on deck. Keats prophesied a storm and by two o'clock it was raging furiously. By early evening water was pouring through the skylight. They had to remain in their bunks tossed from side to side as the *Maria Crowther* pitched and rolled. Their trunks bumped incessantly about the floor. Keats was the calmest of them all. The women were terrified. Severn managed later to get up on deck. 'The watery horizon was like a mountainous country—but the ship's motion was beautifully to the sea falling from one wave to the other in a very lovely manner—the sea each time crossing the deck and one side of the ship being level with the water.' For a time he was reassured, but as it was getting dark the sea began to rush into the cabin through an opening in the planks. He climbed down from his bunk and staggered across to Keats, saying: "Here's pretty music for you." With the greatest calmness Keats replied: "Water parted from the sea!" His mind went back perhaps to early carefree evenings at Novello's where Lamb, that wilful heretic in music, would claim for this ballad of Dr. Arne's, made popular at Vauxhall, superiority over Mozart arias.

With the pumps working incessantly, the sails squalling and the shouts of the sailors, it was a long and terrible night for the passengers 'pinn'd up in our beds like ghosts by daylight.' Severn had to tumble out from time to time to attend to the women, but the painful qualms in his stomach made him get back as soon as he possibly could. The next morning Keats bragged of his friend's 'sailorship,' saying that if he could keep on his legs in that waterlogged cabin he must have been a standing miracle. By daylight the storm had abated, but they were twenty miles back on their course and very soon stayed for want of wind.

They went ashore at Dungeness and scrambled over the gravel, glad to stretch their legs. Severn was astonished and delighted by the enormous waves at least ten feet high which swept curling up the shore. So long did he loiter in one spot staring at the high foaming sea that a coastguardsman came up to ask what he was doing. The stammered explanation that he was watching the waves only confirmed the suspicion of this man of earth that he was looking out for contraband



‘which let down all the high romance which the waves had inspired.’

Detained in the Solent by a contrary wind, the ship put in at Portsmouth. They had been in the Channel ten days now. Assured that no progress could be made that day they went across to Bedhampton, seven miles away, to visit the Snooks. Here the cruel jest of fate was rounded off. Brown, bitterly disappointed at missing Keats so narrowly at Gravesend, and not caring to remain in London, had set off for Chichester where he was staying with old Mr. Dilke. If Keats had known that Brown was only ten miles distant from him he would have been doubly disappointed: from a letter to Fanny Keats, written by Fanny, it would appear as if they had been expecting Brown to follow Keats to Italy. This seems to have been little more than a vivid hope. Probably necessary arrangements for Abigail and the child necessitated Brown remaining in England. A few months later he would have gone more than willingly, but a shortage of money prevented him.

Keats maintained a resolutely cheerful manner. The Snooks thought that he looked and seemed far better than they would have expected. In his old picturesque way he abused the Captain roundly for their delay and expressed a lively dislike of Mrs. Pidgeon. Brown, writing about Keats’s visit to Bedhampton, said: ‘neither the boisterous weather, nor his antipathies, nor his anger, will do him harm . . . they are good physic to his mind, & will help to purge away his apprehensions.’ Brown knew better than anyone except George the danger of brooding to Keats and his craving in mental disturbance to be moving on. What he could not know was the full extent of his agony at leaving Fanny Brawne. At Bedhampton he had been sorely tempted to return to London.

Off Yarmouth, Isle of Wight, where the *Maria Crowther* was soon becalmed, having been unable to get out of the Solent before the wind dropped, Keats nerved himself to write the letter to Brown which he had been delaying in the hope of being able to give his friend some hint of recovery. Now he felt that he ought to write while he had strength left to him:

I wish to write on subjects that will not agitate me much—there is one I must mention and have done with it. Even if my body

would recover of itself, this would prevent it. The very thing which I want to live most for will be a great occasion of my death. I cannot help it. Who can help it? Were I in health it would make me ill, and how can I bear it in my state? I dare say you will be able to guess on what subject I am harping—you know what was my greatest pain during the first part of my illness at your house. I wish for death every day and night to deliver me from these pains, and then I wish death away, for death would destroy even those pains which are better than nothing. Land and Sea, weakness and decline are great separators, but death is the great divorcer for ever. When the pang of this thought has passed through my mind, I may say the bitterness of death is passed.

I often wish for you that you might flatter me with the best. I think without my mentioning it for my sake you would be a friend to Miss Brawne when I am dead. You think she has many faults—but, for my sake, think she has not one—if there is any thing you can do for her by word or deed I know you will do it. I am in a state at present in which woman merely as woman can have no more power over me than stocks and stones, and yet the difference of my sensations with respect to Miss Brawne and my Sister is amazing. The one seems to absorb the other to a degree incredible. I seldom think of my Brother and Sister—in America. The thought of leaving Miss Brawne is beyond every thing horrible—the sense of darkness coming over me—I eternally see her figure eternally vanishing. Some of the phrases she was in the habit of using during my last nursing at Wentworth place ring in my ears. Is there another Life? Shall I awake and find all this a dream? There must be we cannot be created for this sort of suffering. The receiving of this letter is to be one of yours. I will say nothing about our friendship or rather yours to me more than that as you deserve to escape you will never be so unhappy as I am. I should think of—you in my last moments.

I shall endeavour to write to Miss Brawne if possible to day. A sudden stop to my life in the middle of one of these Letters would be no bad thing for it keeps one in a sort of fever awhile. Though fatigued with a Letter longer than any I have written for a long while it would be better to go on for ever than awake to a sense of contrary winds. We expect to put into Portland roads to night. The Capt<sup>n</sup> the Crew and the Passengers are all ill temper'd and weary. I shall write to dilke. I feel as if I was closing my last letter to you.

The hope of a fair start for Italy was defeated the next day by another calm off the Dorsetshire coast. They landed in Lulworth Cove. The unnaturally high spirits of the early

days of the voyage had been dropping more frequently into dumb despair and heavy brooding, but now Keats appeared to recover for a few hours his old happy communion with nature. Severn was relieved and delighted. He explored under Keats's guidance the 'caverns and grottoes,' the rock tunnels and fissures of Stair Hole and Durdle Door. Keats, he said, was full of 'a poet's pride' in showing his friends the beauties of a coast already familiar to him. We have no record of Keats visiting this part of the country: perhaps, as Thomas Hardy suggested to Sir Sidney Colvin, he was related to a family of the same name who lived round Dorchester and who bore in face and fire and independence of character a marked resemblance to John Keats. He might have explored the caves in childhood. When he returned to the ship, perhaps reminded, by a memory of the happiness of careless boyhood, of the joy he had lost, he wrote down the sonnet:

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art—  
 Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night  
 And watching, with eternal lids apart,  
 Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremité,  
 The moving waters at their priestlike task  
 Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,  
 Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask  
 Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—  
 No—yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,  
 Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,  
 To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,  
 Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,  
 Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,  
 And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

Severn was under the impression that the poem had been composed here. Its beauty and power nourished the hope, never absent from his mind, that Keats might recover. He begged for a copy. Keats wrote the sonnet into the copy of Shakespeare's poems Reynolds had given him, on a blank page opposite the heading 'A Lover's Complaint.' He gave to Severn both the volume and the roughly pencilled draft.

At length after prowling a fortnight about the Channel like a caged lion the *Maria Crowther* broke free and sailed past Land's End into the Bay of Biscay. There she encountered squally weather. The passengers were often confined to their

bunks with port-holes closed for many hours. Miss Cotterell was getting visibly weaker. The confinement and lack of air, added to fears for the safety of the ship in the heavy seas, must have been a living agony to her. She and Keats reacted on one another to the detriment of both. They would compare symptoms with a morbidity distressing to Severn. He was up on deck as much as was possible watching with a painter's eye the magnificence of the driving skies and the long curling waves of the sea. He was cheered at the way in which the gallant little ship met each wave and rode over it diagonally.

Off Cape St. Vincent the wind dropped and a dead calm ensued. On deck and able to converse free from the wind and rain, Keats and Severn read aloud to each other *Don Juan*. When they came to the shipwreck in Canto II Keats flung the book away from him in disgust at the cynicism and flippancy of the treatment.

The sea was smooth with only a gentle undulating movement and glittering bright under a warm sun. They saw in the clarity of the water large and strange fish and once a whale came up to blow. But the lovely serenity was soon to be broken. The next day they found themselves near to some Portuguese men-of-war. At first the vessels were an added interest and they leaned on the taffrail admiring a large four-decker, the *San Josef*, heaving gently on the shimmering waves. Suddenly a shot passed close under the cabin window. The *San Josef* had been signalling, but Captain Walsh was below shaving and no one had answered her. The man-of-war drifted nearer and someone shouting through a speaking-trumpet asked, in English, if the *Maria Crowther* had sighted any Spanish or Portuguese privateers, pirate ships sailing away to South America where an attempt was being made to throw off the dominion of Spain and Portugal. Captain Walsh answered no, but was obliged to bring his vessel nearer the *San Josef* for closer enquiry. The proximity of the immense hulk of the four-decker towering above them, with her decks and rigging swarming with savage, dirty sailors, terrified passengers and captain alike. Captain Walsh had a private reason for fear; vessels in the Bay of Biscay were sometimes plundered. Soon to their relief the *San Josef* sailed away. That afternoon they met with an English naval sloop, a trim,

shining contrast to the grim and filthy *San Josef*. When she heard that the *Maria Crowther* had been challenged she turned in pursuit of the Portuguese warships. The admiral commanding them was not chasing privateers, but was himself a rebel trying to prevent vessels going to the help of Spain which was then in the throes of a Carlist rising.

They passed the rock of Gibraltar before dawn and saw the coast of Barbary lit up by the sun's rays in savage beauty. Soon Gibraltar lay behind them, glowing like a vast topaz. Severn made a water-colour sketch while Keats lay quiet under the spell of the scene 'with a look of serene abstraction upon his worn face.' Severn made of him at least two sketches while they were aboard; one, a pencil drawing of him lying in his bunk reading, is unfortunately lost. The other sketch, a water-colour of Keats hunched in a chair with his eyes on a book, is now in the Keats Museum. It was reproduced by Dr. Caroline Spurgeon in her *Keats's Shakespeare*. In this portrait the nose looks unnaturally large on the thin, drawn face and the hair is dark, lank and without a vestige of curl.

They proceeded in lovely weather and, at length, after a voyage of six weeks, they sailed into the Bay of Naples :

The white houses were lit up with the rising sun, which had just begun to touch them, and being tier above tier upon the hill-slopes, they had a lovely appearance, with so much green verdure and the many vineyards and olive grounds about them. Vesuvius had an immense line of smoke-clouds built up, which every now and then opened and changed with the sun's golden light, edging and composing all kinds of groups and shapes in lengths and masses for miles. Then the mountains of Sorrento to the right seemed like lapis lazuli and gold; the sea between being of a very deep blue such as we had not seen elsewhere, and so rich and beautiful that it gave great splendour to all the objects on shore. . . . Keats was simply entranced with the unsurpassable beauty of the panorama, and looked longingly at the splendid city of Naples and her terraced gardens and vineyards, upon the long range of the Apennines, with majestic Vesuvius emitting strange writhing columns of smoke, golden at their sunlit fringes, and upon the azure foreground covered with ships and all manner of white-sailed small craft.

Severn was always glad when a look of serene enjoyment came to Keats's face, 'for he was often so distraught, with so

sad a look in his eyes and with, moreover, a starved, haunting expression that bewildered me.' He had not yet struck at the root of his friend's suffering. Probably he would in regard to Fanny Brawne have echoed Reynolds's opinion that 'Absence from the poor idle Thing of Woman-kind, to whom he has so unaccountably attached himself will not be an ill thing.'

However much they might long to set foot on land again they could not yet escape from the close confinement of the ship. As there was an epidemic of typhus in London, a not uncommon thing in those days of primitive sanitation, the *Maria Crowther* was put in quarantine for ten days. But it was at least a satisfaction to be held in such a lovely place.

The first few hours in the Bay were delightful to Severn. Miss Cotterell was desperately ill, but even she seemed happier now they were in port. Keats, although her suffering added cruelly to his own, was heartening to her in his gaiety. He could not have avoided regarding her somewhat in the light of a patient and perhaps her need helped him to smother down his own hot pain. If he were marching up against a battery so was she, so young and gentle and a woman. To Severn he talked of that antique world so alive in his mind when 'the Greek galleys and Tyrhenian sloops brought northwards strange tales of what was happening in Hellas and the mysterious East.' Ancient and modern Italy were mingling for them. Boatloads of people passed and repassed in the gay harbour playing upon guitars, laughing, singing or throwing into the bright air snatches of conversation in their liquid lovely tongue as they came alongside to barter.

The ship was anchored near the Castell d' Uovo and all day clusters of richly coloured shouting figures were surrounding her with heaps of bright fruit, grapes, peaches, figs, melons and new kinds to bring fresh delight to the palate. This was a keen pleasure to the ill-fed passengers and especially to Keats who loved ripe fruit. To Severn it seemed as if he were in Paradise.

The English fleet was in the Bay, and seeing the Union Jack flying at the mast-head of the *Maria Crowther*, the Admiral sent an officer to make enquiries. Instead of remaining alongside, Lieutenant Sullivan, with six of his men, came aboard and as the ship was in quarantine there they had to

remain. The ship's quarters, already uncomfortably close, were now horribly congested. However, the cheerfulness of the visitors and the luxury of the food and wine that was brought to them made up at first in some measure for the discomfort. Charles Cotterell, the brother of the sick girl, soon appeared alongside and in his gratitude to Keats and Severn for their care of his sister he loaded them with presents. A bunch of Autumn flowers were a joy to Keats, although he would gladly have given all of them for an English dog-rose.

Soon the rain came down. Discomfort became misery and acute suffering for the invalids. For Miss Cotterell, with her craving for air, it must have been a living hell. Frequent sea-sickness had cleared Severn's liver and he was now feeling particularly well, but even he felt at the end of the period of quarantine as if the foul thick air of the cabin would kill him.

Not many days passed before Charles Cotterell, anxious about his sister, came on board, adding one more to their number. With an English ability to make the best of a situation the little colony were as merry as they were able. The blundering of the British officers brought when the weather was temporarily kind, more of the gay bobbing little boats filled with people come to mock at them. Mr. Cotterell spoke not only Italian fluently, but also the Neapolitan patois and he threw back answers to their gibes much to the taste of the laughing peasants, translating rapidly for the benefit of those on board. Keats delighted Severn by the careless gaiety of his manner. His 'golden jokes' and puns added to the general merriment. But when one of the boatmen struck up in the presence of the ladies an obscene song, he flared up in one of his rages, a 'wisp-of-straw' conflagration. On October 24th he wrote to Mrs. Brawne, 'it looks like a dream—every man who can row his boat and walk and talk seems a different being from myself. I do not feel in the world.' After telling her of their situation, that he was no better and no worse than when he left England and how the illness of Miss Cotterell had played upon his nerves, he wrote :

I dare not fix my Mind upon Fanny, I have not dared to think of her. The only comfort I have had that way has been in thinking for hours together of having the knife she gave me put in a silver-case—the hair in a Locket—and the Pocket Book in a gold net—Show her this. I dare say no more—Yet you must not believe I

am so ill as this Letter may look, for if ever there was a person born without the faculty of hoping I am he . . . O what an account I could give you of the Bay of Naples if I could once more feel myself a Citizen of this world—I feel a spirit in my Brain would lay it forth pleasantly—O what a misery it is to have an intellect in splints ! My love again to Fanny . . .

In the postscript he wrote : ‘ Good bye Fanny ! God bless you.’ In the letter to Brown from Yarmouth he had promised to write to Fanny, but he had not done so. This Fanny may not, for her peace of mind, have known ; it seems doubtful if that painful letter to Brown were sent at the time. She did not want him to suffer the anguish of writing to her.

During the ten days of squalid misery the two men looked longingly at the beautiful city, though they were warned that they would be sadly disillusioned with Naples. On the 31st they left the ship in chilly rain and mist. They took an affectionate leave of the Captain who had been more than kind to them and especially to Keats. Mr. Cotterell had wished to take them to his own house, but he had not room for more than his invalid sister. He conducted them to the inn Villa di Londra and gave them dinner. They rejoiced in the air and space of large rooms with a fine view of Vesuvius, but they had already found out the truth of their friends’ disparagement of Naples. They were ‘ quite taken aback by the dirt, the noise, and the smell.’ Severn gives a vivid account of the city :

Everything seemed offensive, except the glorious autumnal atmosphere, and the sense of light and joy of the vintage, which was everywhere in evidence. With songs and laughter and cries, and endless coming and going, the whole city seemed in motion . . . The city itself, with its indiscriminate noises and bewildering smells, struck us as one great kitchen, for cooking was going on in every street and at almost every house—at, not in, for it was all done out-of-doors or upon the thresholds. At every corner was a bare-legged Neapolitan devouring macaroni and roaring for more ; mariners in red caps were hawking fish at the tip-top of their voices ; and everywhere beggars were strumming guitars or howling ballads. The whole occupation of the citizens seemed to be done in the streets, and never ceased, for, as we soon experienced, it went on all night, so that at first we could not sleep for the continued row.

It will be seen from the above that the wet weather did not last long. The glorious autumnal air warm with the sun



was a heady wine away from the stench of the city. The scent and joy of the grape-harvest penetrated even to the heart of Naples, for men ran about the streets with heavy-laden baskets of the fruit shouting their wares in a raucous delight.

On the next day Severn wrote to Haslam telling him that Keats was calm and 'thinks favourably of this place for we are meeting with much kind treatment on every side.' Keats himself wrote to Brown :

. . . I am afraid to speak of what I would fainest dwell upon. As I have gone thus far into it, I must go on a little ;—perhaps it may relieve the load of WRETCHEDNESS which presses upon me. The persuasion that I shall see her no more will kill me. I cannot q—  
My dear Brown, I should have had her when I was in health, and I should have remained well. I can bear to die—I cannot bear to leave her. O, God ! God ! God ! Everything I have in my trunks that reminds me of her goes through me like a spear. The silk lining she put in my travelling cap scalds my head. My imagination is horribly vivid about her—I see her—I hear her. There is nothing in the world of sufficient interest to divert me from her a moment. This was the case when I was in England ; I cannot recollect, without shuddering, the time that I was a prisoner at Hunt's, and used to keep my eyes fixed on Hampstead all day. Then there was a good hope of seeing her again—Now !—O that I could be buried near where she lives ! I am afraid to write to her—to receive a letter from her—to see her handwriting would break my heart—even to hear of her anyhow, to see her name written, would be more than I can bear. My dear Brown, what am I to do ? Where can I look for consolation or ease ? If I had any chance of recovery, this passion would kill me. Indeed, through the whole of my illness, both at your house and at Kentish Town, this fever has never ceased wearing me out. When you write to me, which you will do immediately, write to Rome (*poste restante*)—if she is well and happy, put a mark thus + ; if—

Remember me to all. I will endeavour to bear my miseries patiently. A person in my state of health should not have such miseries to bear. Write a short note to my sister, saying you have heard from me. Severn is very well. If I were in better health I would urge your coming to Rome. I fear there is no one can give me any comfort. Is there any news of George ? O, that something fortunate had ever happened to me or my brothers !—then I might hope,—but despair is forced upon me as a habit. My dear Brown, for my sake, be her advocate for ever. I cannot

say a word about Naples ; I do not feel at all concerned in the thousand novelties around me. I am afraid to write to her—I should like her to know that I do not forget her. Oh, Brown, I have coals of fire in my breast. It surprises me that the human heart is capable of containing and bearing so much misery. Was I born for this end ? God bless her, and her mother, and my sister, and George, and his wife, and you, and all !

That night misery broke through his resolutely composed mask of feeling and he told Severn much of his grief. His loving emotional friend was at first overwhelmed but encouraged him to talk in the hope that it might relieve him. He went to bed outwardly calm again.

Finding that they had missed the courier they had kept their letters back. The next morning Severn added to his letter to Haslam telling him how Keats had spoken out and he felt sure it had relieved him. He ended : ‘ this morning he is still very much better. We are in good spirits and I may say hopeful fellows—at least I may say as much for Keats—he made an Italian pun to-day—the rain is coming down in torrents.’ It is evident that Keats had not told Severn of his inward conviction that he must die.

They remained in Naples four days. Charles Cotterell and other members of the English colony were kind and attentive to them. They drove out into the country round. Keats admired the flowers growing in abundance and especially the roses, though on being presented with a bouquet of them from a garden he was disappointed to find in them no scent. The story goes that he threw the bunch down in disgust, exclaiming that a rose without scent was a humbug and that he hated humbug both in men and flowers. This, told years later at second-hand, was probably an exaggeration. One can hardly imagine Keats, with his love of flowers, handling them roughly or even making a violent remark about a gift procured from an entire stranger by Cotterell who had taken the trouble to descend from the carriage to ask for the roses. On this ride his old humour gleamed up at the sight of some men by the wayside ravening macaroni in large quantities. He asked that some small coin to buy more macaroni might be thrown to these fellows who scorned ‘ the humbug of knives and forks.’

If Keats had been in health his native humour and his

ability to discern behind 'disagreeables' essential truth would have helped him, in spite of the misery of the people, to enjoy the broad Hogarthian scenes in the streets of Naples. We might have had from him sketches as comic and yet as tragically poignant as the 'Duchess of Dunghill.' The movement and volubility of the crowds were at this time increased by unwonted excitement; there was a revolution in progress. The yoke of the Austrian was for a brief space thrown off. Keats had little faith in the power of the people to maintain their liberty even when he saw the outwardly imposing ranks of the King's army. The physique of the men was poor; dire poverty and disease had weakened the Neapolitans to a painful degree. Men and women with faces disfigured and eaten away by a foul disease were a common sight. Professional beggars were an abiding horror to the tourist. This was not the environment for a sick man with nerves on stretch with weakness and sorrow; a man who had in health felt so strongly the misery of the common people. Severn had wanted him to remain in Naples, thinking that the kindness and attention of Cotterell and his friends might be ill exchanged for unknown conditions in Rome, but Keats was anxious to get away.

Two days after the liberation the King of Naples betrayed his people and fled to the Austrians. That evening Keats and Severn went to the San Carlo, a theatre, the interior of which was so heavily gilded that it seemed to be built of gold. In common with all Neapolitan theatres it stank abominably. The acting was poor and the singing indifferent, but the men admired the scene-painting and especially the representation of two soldiers on either side of the stage. The audience were quiet and dispirited now their dream of liberty was over. When the act came to an end Keats and Severn were amazed to see the two soldiers move. They were not painted effigies, but flesh-and-blood sentries put upon the stage to regulate the performance and to intimidate the audience. Keats was immediately furious. He worked himself up into a frenzy of anger and contempt. He declared he would go at once to Rome, that he could not bear to think that he might die and be buried among people so debased. The next morning a letter arrived from Shelley repeating his invitation and giving Keats advice how to live in the country. But Keats

had already written to Dr. Clark in Rome asking him to obtain lodgings for them, and the letter of credit was with Torlonia, the banker, there. To Rome they would go.

After a farewell dinner given by Cotterell in their honour they set out the next morning in a small carriage. The *vettura* crawled along and Severn was able comfortably to keep walking pace beside it. It was a lovely day and he was enjoying the air and exercise. Keats was quiet and listless, though he tried to respond to Severn's enthusiasm for the beauty of the country. In face of an exceptionally fine view, or when they caught sight of the blueness of the sea, he would brighten a little. Severn picked wild flowers to show him and soon the little carriage was filled with fragrance and blossom. Severn found gratification in the strange delight, the almost fanatical ecstasy of Keats over the flowers.

They passed through rich valleys with the hills above them covered for miles and miles with vineyards in which the grape-vines were festooned in lovely natural twists and curves from tree to tree. Severn felt that this land of promise was 'thrown away on these idle beasts of Italians' who 'crawl about like moving logs.' The inns on the road to Rome were notoriously bad and Keats's health was not improved by the poor accommodation and indifferent food. The journey, taking it slowly as they did, seems to have occupied about nine days.

At length they reached the Roman Campagna, the vast uneven wastes of which Keats likened to an inland ocean. Contemporary descriptions of the approach to Rome suggest, in the typical period dislike of wide, solitary spaces, something of the hateful, menacing desolation of Browning's country in 'Child Roland to the Dark Tower came.' Carcasses and skeletons of horses lay about. Ghastly shrivelled arms and legs of highwaymen, the pests of richer travellers, were stuck on posts at intervals on the road. Sometimes there would tower above them a stretch of massy, ruined aqueduct, grim relic of a dead glory.

On the wideness of the plain they saw a shifting spot of bright red, and on approaching, found it to be the crimson cloak of a cardinal. He was shooting small birds which he attracted towards the ground by a small looking-glass

attached to an owl tied loosely to a stick. Two liveried footmen were in solemn attendance to load the fowling-pieces.

The bare loneliness of the approach to Rome heightened her ancient beauty. Keats entered her by the Lateran Gate, never to leave her again.

‘Land and Sea, weakness and decline are great separators, but death is the great divorcer for ever.’

## CHAPTER XXI

### *The End*

**D**R. CLARK HAD TAKEN LODGINGS FOR THEM IN THE PIAZZA di Spagna in a house opposite to his own and beside the steps leading up to the church of the Trinità on the Pincian Hill.

The Piazza di Spagna was in the heart of the English quarter of Rome. There were at this time so many English in the city that to the poorer Roman the word 'traveller' was almost synonymous with 'Englishman.' There were many Scotch and English innkeepers and some of the Italian *albergatori* took British names. All the English in Rome were regarded as 'Milords' by the people of the tradesmen class and thought to be fabulously rich. Prices were regulated accordingly. The wealthy would enter Rome through the Porto del Popolo and drive through the Via del Babuino into the Piazza di Spagna. Here their high and bulky travelling-carriages, too large to be driven into mews or stables, would stand, much to the inconvenience of both foot-passengers and vehicles.

The Spanish Embassy in the square gave to it its name. In the centre is an old fountain called *della Barcaccia* and made in the form of a galley. This commemorates the legend that here the Emperor Domitian had an arena in which he staged mimic sea-fights. The square is called in an old Italian Itinerary 'one of the most beautiful and magnificent in Rome.' It was a highway from the fashionable walk on the Pincian Hill to the Corso, the main street of the city, and a lively position for an invalid. Round the fountain brightly coloured chattering groups of peasants would gather.

Dr. James Clark, a Scotsman of thirty-two, was a physician and surgeon who had made a special study of phthisis. Later he became Queen Victoria's physician-in-ordinary and was

knighted. As a pleasant doctor who prescribed pleasant tasting medicines his reputation among the wealthy was high until he blundered over the case of Lady Flora Hastings, one of the Queen's unmarried ladies. He asserted without having made an examination that she was pregnant. Indignation was general and his practice quickly disappeared. When the unhappy woman died of a malignant growth the powerful Hastings family demanded that he should be dismissed by the Queen, but she refused. In the last illness of the Prince Consort he was equally inept. He refused to call a physician in consultation until he was forced to do so by an indignant letter from the Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston. Then it was too late. The Prince was dying of typhus fever. It would seem, therefore, that Clark was a poor doctor, but in Keats's case a lack of skill was balanced by his kindness of heart. Little could be done for Keats now by medical attention.

From the first Dr. Clark took a vivid interest in Keats and heartily wished he were wealthy enough to maintain him in Rome at his own expense. He quickly realised that there was on his patient's mind a load which would retard recovery and he wrote to England to say that all financial anxiety must be removed. He feared that Keats might be painfully conscious of living on the money of friends. Although he suspected disease of the heart and lungs he thought the main seat of the trouble to be in the stomach. He found Severn 'very attentive to him, but . . . not best suited for his companion.' It seems likely that poor Severn was affected by illness, and especially the illness of a friend, in the same way as Keats, but with less power of mind or discipline of past sorrow to control the feeling. In quarantine he had once been obliged to creep away into a corner to indulge in a passion of tears. Acute sensibility made his task of nursing Keats harder and his unselfish devotion the finer.

At first Keats's health improved. Rome could not but be a joy to him, although it was a pale shadow of that joy he might have felt in health and with his love beside him. To the young painter it was a revelation. The past was re-animated for him in the mind of the poet Keats; that universal mind which could leap the centuries and live freely in time. Regular sight-seeing was forbidden to Keats by

Dr. Clark who feared that the excitement might be too much for him : he did, however, go to see one of the notorieties of the day, the new statue by Canova of the Princess Borghese, a sister of Napoleon. The statue is nude to the waist and reclines on a sofa with the body lifted up on one elbow. The other arm rests lightly on the up-curved hip and the hand holds an apple. Keats found it 'in beautiful bad taste' and gave it a name which was to remain, 'The Æolian Harp.' It is told of Princess Pauline that when a friend remonstrated with her for sitting half-naked to the sculptor, she replied : "Oh, there was a very good fire in the room." This beautiful and notorious lady used to walk on the fashionable promenade, the Pincian Hill. Here Keats and Severn spent much of their time with a consumptive who was alone in Rome, a Lieutenant Elton. Elton was a tall and exceptionally handsome man and attracted the roving eye of the Princess. Her bold and languishing glances so wrought upon Keats's nerves that he declared he could walk on the Pincian Hill no longer. Soon, however, the Doctor ordered exercise on horseback and the two young invalids went riding together. Severn was now freer. He could study the beauties of Rome and begin to pursue his art again.

Soon after their arrival Keats had insisted that Severn should visit the artists to whom he had introductions. Dr. Clark had given him a further introduction to John Gibson, the sculptor. When Severn arrived at the studio Lord Colchester, a connoisseur and patron of the arts, was present. He modestly made a move to retire, but Gibson insisted he should come in and gave him the same attention as to the nobleman. This struck Severn as odd and gratifying. It made him feel that artists must be men of considerably more consequence in Rome than in England where they were treated as a kind of superior tradesmen. He hastened home to tell Keats who was delighted with what he called this first 'treat to humanity.' In discussing Severn's prospects Keats was not too sure that the coming to Rome would be an advantage in his application for the Scholarship. He felt that the touchy Council of the Academy might be offended. Here was a man applying for the Rome Scholarship when he was already there. He had a private reason to believe there would be considerable opposition to the award of the pension and he



told Severn about it now for the first time. The group of painters round the Academy were prone to sorry jealousies. He had been present at a dinner at De Wint's house when the award of the gold medal was being discussed. One painter said it had been given to an old man who had tried for it so many times that the Council felt pity for him. Keats waited for this absurd lie to be refuted. Hilton was there and he was personally acquainted with Severn. No word came. Keats rose in a passion, saying he would no longer sit at table with such traducers and snobs; that they very well knew that Severn was a young man and had never before tried for a prize of any kind. He knew him intimately and had seen and admired the picture sent in. He walked out of the house.

Keats urged his friend to begin at once upon sketches for the picture he must submit to the Academy. The subject of it was to be 'The Death of Alcibiades.' While Severn worked, he read or studied Italian. He even contemplated writing a long poem on Milton's *Sabrina*, a project he had discussed with Severn on the journey out. He tried loyally to remain cheerful in aspect and to employ his restless mind, but one day he opened a volume of Alfieri at the first tragedy in the book, 'Filippo,' and he had not read twenty lines of it when he came upon :

Misera me ! sollievo a me non resta  
Altro che'l pianto, ed il pianto è delitto.<sup>1</sup>

He lost his control and threw the book away from him in anguish.

On November 30th he wrote with difficulty his last letter. It was to Brown. He said :

... I am afraid to encounter the pro-ing and con-ing of anything interesting to me in England. I have an habitual feeling of my real life having passed, and that I am leading a posthumous existence. God knows how it would have been—but it appears to me—however, I will not speak of that subject. I must have been at Bedhampton nearly at the time you were writing to me from Chichester—how unfortunate—and to pass on the river too! There was my star predominant! I cannot answer anything in your letter, which followed me from Naples to Rome, because I am afraid to look it over again. I am so weak (in mind) that I

<sup>1</sup> 'Wretched me ! there is no solace left for me  
Except weeping, and weeping is a crime.'

cannot bear the sight of any handwriting of a friend I love so much as I do you. Yet I ride the little horse, and, at my worst, even in quarantine, summoned up more puns, in a sort of desperation, in one week than in any year of my life. There is one thought enough to kill me ; I have been well, healthy, alert, &c., walking with her, and now—the knowledge of contrast, feeling for light and shade, all that information (primitive sense) necessary for a poem, are great enemies to the recovery of the stomach. There, you rogue, I put you to the torture ; but you must bring your philosophy to bear, as I do mine, really, or how should I be able to live ?

He said he had not yet written to Reynolds but delayed week by week in the hope of being able to send better news of his health. He wrote sadly :

If I recover, I will do all in my power to correct the mistakes made during sickness ; and if I should not, all my faults will be forgiven.

He asked Brown to write to George and to his sister ‘ who walks about my imagination like a ghost—she is so like Tom.’ He ended : ‘ I can scarcely bid you goodbye, even in a letter. I always made an awkward bow. God bless you ! ’

The stomach-trouble was not improved by the bad food they had for the first week. It was sent up by a *trattoria* or restaurant situated, Severn told a visitor in old age, on the ground floor of the house. It seems to have belonged to the landlady. Complaints to her being of no avail Keats hit upon a plan to mend matters which he would not reveal to his friend. When next the porter came up with the food Keats went forward smiling roguishly at Severn and saying : “ Now, Severn, you’ll see it ! ” Taking the large square tin-box which contained the dishes he opened the window ‘ and thus disappeared a fowl, a rice pudding, cauliflower, a dish of macaroni, etc.’ The *padrona* was present but she joined good-naturedly in the shout of laughter which went up from the astonished porter. “ Now,” said Keats, “ you’ll see, Severn, that we’ll have a decent dinner.” In less than half an hour an excellent meal came up and without extra charge. In future they were well served. Severn appreciated the good fare and especially the vegetables which were fine and beautifully cooked. The *padrona* however charged them heavily on the general assumption that all Englishmen were ‘ milords.’

As Keats had expressed a wish for music Severn hired from

On December 14th Severn wrote unhappily to Mrs. Brawne. This letter did not reach England until late in the next month, for on January 16th we find Fanny Brawne telling Fanny Keats that her brother is exercising on horseback every day. It was from a letter written to Brown on the 17th that Mrs. Brawne heard the mournful news of Keats's relapse.

Christmas, probably the first he had spent away from his family, was to Severn 'the strangest and saddest, yet not altogether the least happy I had ever spent.' Keats, now rid of his fever but weak and suffering, must often from his bed have watched this friend of his who was older in years and yet so much younger at heart. Severn was a man who in many ways never grew old. He kept to the end old enthusiasms and found new ones. He saw life perhaps too rosily but this gift could bring happiness to others. Keats must have wondered what future lay before this eager, volatile spirit. One day he turned his large eyes, glowing in his thin face, towards his friend and said :

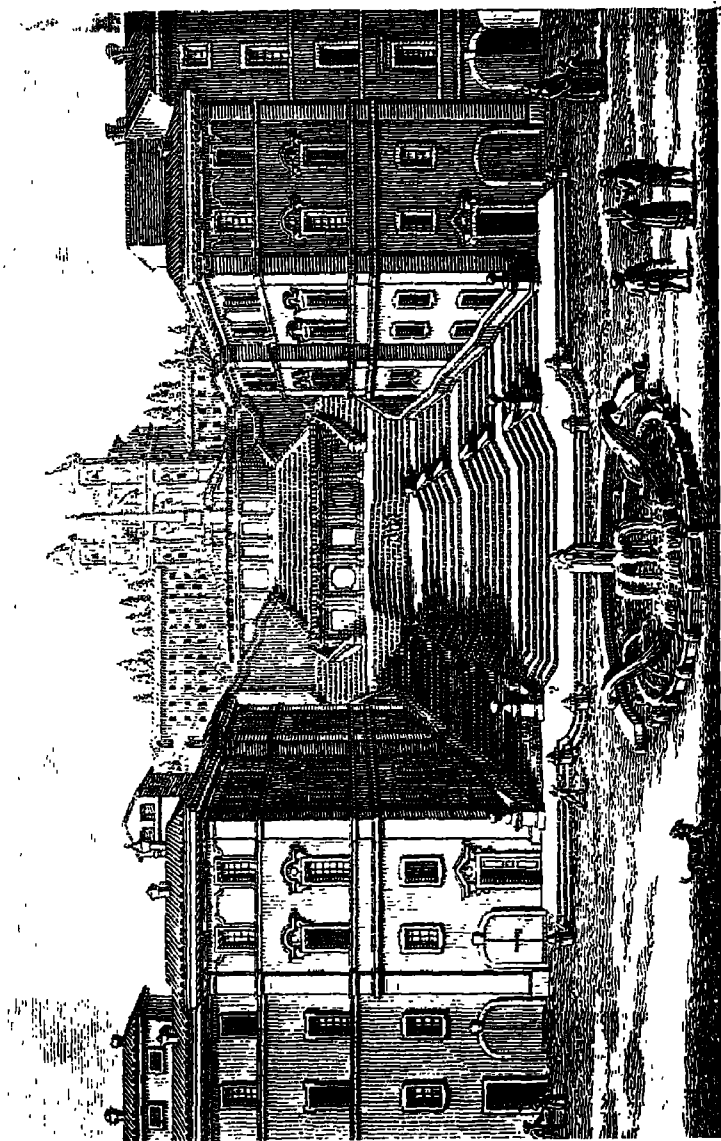
"Severn, I bequeath to you all the happiness I have ever known."

Severn thought he was wandering again and tried to soothe him. But Keats continued firmly :

"This is the last Christmas I shall ever see but I hope you will see many and be happy. It would be second death for me if I knew that your goodness now was your loss hereafter."

Perhaps it was permitted to him to know that Severn's temporary sacrifice to him was the means of his prosperity in the future. It was as the friend of Keats that his reputation first rose in the English colony in Rome to spread outward over the years until he was a successful painter in oils with a European patronage.

In early January, Severn had a fresh anxiety added to his burden. The *padrona* reported to the police that there was a man in her house dying of consumption. This meant that by Roman law everything in his room, even the paper on the walls, would after his death be destroyed by fire and compensation paid to the owner. As the fever left Keats and he slowly improved in health he was moved for a part of the day into the larger, airier sitting-room. If this were known it would mean that the contents of both rooms would be burnt.



THE PIAZZA DI SPAGNA, ROME  
From an old print.



There was in the sitting-room property to the value of one hundred and fifty pounds apart from the personal loss of books and private possessions. It would be difficult enough to pay for the simple furnishings of the bedroom without this large sum being added. Severn had no money and was well aware that none would come from his friend's estate. He had to move Keats without the landlady's knowledge. This was not easy for she lived on the same floor and the servant, when she did trouble to clean the lodgers' apartments, entered from an adjoining room. Severn took the precaution of blocking up the communicating door while he prepared the room for Keats. Naturally Keats could not be told anything of the matter. Severn was forced to go dinnerless and to tell him that the servant had prepared the room while he took a meal out. Keats did not believe him but, mercifully for Severn, made no further enquiry. No one but Dr. Clark knew of the use of the second room.

By the middle of the month Keats was well enough to go out into the sunshine but this news could not reach England until the next month. Severn's despairing letter to Brown had only arrived to him on January 9th. At Wentworth Place Brown and the two women were in a state of miserable suspense. It was Mrs. Brawne's painful task, herself agitated, to tell her daughter that Keats was dangerously ill. She received the news with the calmness of despair. She said: "I believe he must soon die and when you hear of his death tell me immediately. I am not a fool." Brown wrote to Severn:

He is present to me everywhere and at all times—he now seems sitting by my side and looking hard in my face, though I have taken the opportunity of writing this in company—for I scarcely believe I could do it alone. Much as I have loved him, I never knew how closely he was wound about my heart.

He expressed again his personal gratitude to Severn. In a letter to Keats of December 21st he had written: "Do you remember my anagram on your name? How pat it comes now to Severn! My love to him and the said anagram, "*Thanks Joe!*" "

Severn's letters to his family were as cheerful as he could make them. He laid stress for his mother's benefit on the

good food and how he enjoyed it. He told them that 'at the beginning of January all the trees were in blossom here, and in our houses we have roses blowing—when I know you have nothing but your bellows blowing.'

On January 11th he wrote hopefully to Mrs. Brawne; out of a mistaken sense of kindness, too hopefully. Keats, he said, 'had changed to calmness and quietude, as singular as productive of good, for his mind was most certainly killing him.' Keats himself had no wish to live and had taken a final leave 'of this world and all its future hopes.' But out of this calm, this putting aside of dreams and ambitions, his friend hoped that new strength would come.

Fanny had withheld the bad news from Fanny Keats but now when there was 'merely a hope, a chance,' she wrote to tell her of the attack. She could not share with Severn the delusion that the calm which was come upon Keats might herald a recovery. 'He has given up even wishing to live.'

Good God! is it to be borne that he, formed for everything good, and, I think I dare say, for everything great is to give up his hopes of life and happiness so young too, and to be murdered, for that is the case, by a mere malignity of the world, joined to want of feeling in those who ought above all to have felt for him—I am sure that nothing during his long illness has hurt me so much as to hear he was resigned to die. . . .

Towards the end of January Keats was again seriously ill. This attack he knew himself would be his last. When the hæmorrhages were over he lay with eyes closed in a sunken state bordering on death. Severn sitting by him far into the night felt it dangerous to fall asleep. Often he had kept himself awake by writing letters, but to-night he had not the heart for that. He wept silently as he looked at the wan, thin face on the pillow. Suddenly he thought of a way in which he could both keep himself awake and give to Keats's friends a memorial of these last days. He made a tender and lovely drawing<sup>1</sup> of Keats's head with the light of the candle upon it. Underneath it he wrote, '28th Jan. 3 o'clock M. Drawn to keep me awake—a deadly sweat was on him all this night.'

Now Severn was scarcely ever able to leave him. He seems, perhaps from motives of economy, no longer to have had his

<sup>1</sup> Original is in the Keats Shelley Memorial House, Rome.

meals sent up from the *trattoria* below and often had to depend for food on the kindly ministrations of Mrs. Clark who was constantly sending in small delicacies, both for invalid and nurse. That nervous irritability which makes the attendance on consumptives peculiarly hard now increased to an almost unbearable degree: by day and night Keats was making demands on him. He would ask for a hot drink and when it was given him no longer want it. Once Severn made coffee for him twice and each time he threw it away without drinking it. When Severn patiently made a third cup Keats was touched into his old consideration and love for his friend. He broke down, crying out against the fate which made him inflict so much suffering on one so devoted. He wondered, knowing his friend's uneven temperament, that he could remain so steadfast. He knew Severn to be an earnest Christian and felt he must be supported now by a higher power. Severn who had inwardly lamented Keats's lack of faith, and that in his last moments he could not have the consolation of religion, procured a copy of Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Dying* and tried to prepare Keats's mind for death. Keats listened with patience, eager to grasp at a hope of a life to come. He allowed Severn to pray beside him.

Keats's bright falcon eyes were large and of an unearthly brightness. When Dr. Clark came in he would look up at him and say: "How long is this posthumous existence of mine to last?" The good doctor, although accustomed to pain and death, was so moved that often he could not speak.

There was added to Severn's anxieties the possibility of money difficulties. On coming to Rome Keats had on the advice of Torlonia, the banker, drawn one hundred and twenty pounds on his first draft and placed it in the Bank. This had put Taylor in an awkward position; he had been expecting that the credit would be drawn upon in small sums and that in the meantime he could make up the balance with money sent over by George. Not a penny had come from America and Taylor found himself unable to meet the credit. Dr. Clark wrote to England urging that the matter be set right at once as no word of money difficulties must come to the ear of his patient. Taylor immediately set to work to collect some money. Rice, Hilton and other friends subscribed ten pounds each and Taylor took fifty



from a sum entrusted to him by Lord Fitzwilliam for the benefit of the peasant poet Clare and John Keats. This was done as rapidly as possible, but the matter could not be arranged with Torlonia in far away Italy before the harassed Severn was reduced to his last crown and that was owing for rent. He could have earned money by painting miniatures for the wealthy English in Rome, but he was unable to leave the house. Keats could not bear him out of his sight.

This heavy anxiety, added to the ever-present inward grief that his friend was dying 'without the common spiritual comforts that many a rogue and fool has in his last moments,' made Severn's burden almost intolerable. But he went on day after day by the death-bed, tending, soothing and humouring his friend and sitting up far into the night. Sometimes, however hard he might try to fight against it, fatigue would overcome him. He would awake in the dark and have to fumble with flint and steel before he could get a light again. One night Keats awoke just as the candle was guttering to the finish and, as Severn was dozing, did not like to rouse him. Suddenly a second candle lit up as if by magic. Keats, charmed, called out: "Severn! Severn! here's a little fairy lamplighter actually lit up the second candle!" Severn had fixed a thread from the base of one candle to the wick of the other.

These days were dark and long. Keats lay in his bed in painful longing for kindly death. Anxious letters came from friends, but he had no wish to see them. He was too far now from life. His sister and his beloved wrote. Their letters remained unopened. Fanny Brawne's letters were only to be given to him if he expressed a wish to hear from her. He never did. Once when Severn inadvertently gave him a letter from her the painful agitation it aroused threw him into a fever. He could not open it.

At home the poor girl was waiting for the end which must come. From time to time her nerves would betray her into fits of boisterous gaiety painful to her anxious mother and to Brown. Mrs. Brawne had kept from her the worst of the news. Brown did not agree with this course, thinking it better she should know the exact state of affairs. She wrote to Fanny Keats: 'All I do is to persuade myself, I shall never see him again.'

Dr. Clark, afraid that Severn might break down, arranged for an English nurse to relieve him. Keats liked her. Severn was able to get out into the air and sunshine. He could come back fresher to the arduous watching and could brighten Keats's lingering hours with the beauty of an Italian spring. Keats asked him to visit his last resting-place, the open burial-ground of the non-catholics at the foot of Monte Testaccio within the ancient walls of the city. There were daisies and anemones there and sweet-scented violets overspreading the graves. Keats loved violets. He said: "I can already feel the flowers growing over me." Sheep grazed on the open field and flocks of goats were brought there. A few ilex-trees threw a dark and grateful shade and an ancient tomb, the pyramid of Caius Cestius, pointed upwards to the sky linking the old with the new, a silent memory of antique time. It was a scene in part familiar to Keats for Poussin, Claude and Salvator Rosa loved it and painted there. 'It might make one in love with death, to think that one should be buried in so sweet a place.'

Unfortunately the nurse was taken ill, so after a few brief hours of leisure Severn was again kept by the bedside. As Keats neared the grave he became calmer. He would talk a good deal, but so peacefully that Severn could not even now entirely suppress a tiny flame of hope. One night when he had been in tranquil converse with his friend, Keats asked that on his gravestone there should be written: 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water.'

His greatest anxiety was for Severn. "You must not," he said, "look at me in my dying gasp nor breathe my passing breath—not even breathe on me." The risk to Severn's health was greater than Keats could in his generation have guessed. Severn was not a robust man and years of sedentary work must have robbed him of much of the resilience of youth. But mercifully the tragic story of John Keats was not further darkened by the death of his devoted friend. By some miracle Severn escaped infection.

Three days before Keats's death he was visited by a Spanish gentleman, Señor Valentin Maria Llanos y Gutierrez, who, if Keats could have looked into the future, would have been of singular interest to him. With an introduction probably from Severn, Señor Llanos visited the Brawnes in September,

1821, and soon after called on Miss Fanny Keats at Walthamstow. In March, 1826, she became Señora Llanos.

From time to time in these last days Keats gave to Severn clear directions as to what he wished to be done after his death. As he lay quietly waiting for the end he held tightly in his hand a white cornelian, 'the gift of his widowing love.' This seemed to be his only consolation, the only thing tangible in a shadowy world. As he grew weaker he would lie for hours as if asleep. When he opened his eyes there was in them a look of doubt and horror until he saw the familiar figure of his friend sitting patiently by him. It was these 'bright falcon eyes' which alone remained to bring to Severn's memory those happy hours in wood and meadow when the light and colour, the small rustlings of nature had brought to them quick attention and a rapt joy. Now they had a steady piercing, an unearthly look hardly to be borne.

At half-past four in the afternoon of Friday, February 23rd, he whispered: "Severn, lift me up, for I am dying. I shall die easy." Looking up into the frightened face of his friend he added: "Don't be frightened. Thank God it has come."

Severn took him in his arms. The phlegm was boiling and tearing in his chest and throat. The grim fight for breath lasted seven hours. He held fast to Severn's hand. At eleven o'clock the breathing was easier for life was ebbing away. He might have been sleeping. Before midnight he was dead.

The next day his body was opened. The lungs were found to be almost entirely destroyed. The marvel was that he had lived so long. A cast was taken of the face, hand and foot. Unopened letters from the two girls he loved were placed in the coffin, together with a purse and some hair. The letter from Fanny Brawne, the receipt of which had so torn his spirit, was laid on his heart.

He was buried on the 25th. There followed Severn, Dr. Clark and a Dr. Luby, Dr. Wolff (the English Chaplain), William Ewing, Seymour Kirkup, Henry Parke and Ambrose Poynter. Because of the hostility of the Romans to non-Catholics it was necessary for interments in the Protestant

cemetery to take place at night or in the early morning. It was dark when the carriages left the Piazza di Spagna but the day was breaking as they reached the foot of the pyramid of Caius Cestius.

Severn, exhausted and grief-stricken, had to be supported at the grave-side by William Ewing. After the men had filled in the earth Dr. Clark made them plant some tufts of daisies on the mound. He thought Keats would have wished it.

Severn for weeks lay ill in the sad last home in the Piazza di Spagna. He spent long years in Rome, in old age as her British Consul, and he watched with pride the growing fame of Keats, valuing more and more the privilege of having once been his friend.

The news did not reach England until the middle of March. Fanny Brawne took it quietly. To his sister she wrote : 'you do not, you never can know how much he suffered. So much that I do believe were it in my power I would not bring him back.' She wasted with inward grief. She lost her fine colour and was for years painfully thin. It was twelve years before she married. She never spoke willingly of him and she wore the ring he had given her to the day of her death.

Throughout the long years Severn lived in the memory of Keats. To pass through the Piazza di Spagna was ever pain to him. He would spend quiet hours alone in the burial-ground at the foot of Mount Testaccio where the tomb of old Caius Cestius threw for a space of each day a pointing shadow, the shadow of antique time, over the grave of Keats. By early summer the red-rimmed daisies had overspread the grave and soon the violets crept up. When in 1861 Severn returned to Rome after an absence of twenty years the custodian of the cemetery complained that he could not keep the violets on the grave ; they were so constantly plucked as remembrances. Severn answered him, rejoicing : "Sow and plant twice as much."

Sixty-one years after Keats's death his body was laid there beside the honoured grave of his friend ; the nameless grave on which is written those words immortal :

Here lies One  
Whose Name was writ in Water.



## APPENDIX

Letter to *Mr. Haslam, Frampton & Co., Leadenhall Street*, postmarked  
*Au. 23. 1820 and Hampstead.*

WENTWORTH PLACE,  
*Wednesday.*

My dear Haslam,

I have been at M<sup>rs</sup> Brawne's above a fortnight for a reason or by an accident I will explain when I am more fit for such things. The purport of the present not(e) is to tell you that if I can manage it I certainly intend going speedily to Rome. I have written to Abbey for some Money which he promised to lend me in case George did not remit part of the loan from me. I have written to Brown to ask him to accompany me ; and in fact am all but on the Road as the Physician tells me an english winter would do for me. Now will you let George and M<sup>rs</sup> Wylie know all this, and there will be so much anxiety taken off my Mind. Mention in your Letter to George that Fanny complains sadly of not hearing from him. I could say much more than this half sheet would hold, but the oppression I have at the Chest will not suffer my Pen to be long-winded. My Compts to M<sup>rs</sup> H—— who I hope is well.

Your sincere friend

John Keats—

P.S. I have read this note over and think it goes rather snappish—you will believe I did not intend it.

Goodbye.

This letter was sold on March 16th, 1937, by Messrs. Sotheby & Co., to Dr. Rosenbach for £550.

## NOTE :

IN the books of the Protestant Cemetery at Rome, Keats's burial is recorded as at fifteen hours in the morning. This, so far as I can gather, was according to the Italian time of that date nine o'clock. That he was, however, buried at dawn seems certain from the following memorandum among the papers given by Sir Sidney Colvin to the Keat Memorial House, written about 1850 by Ambrose Poynter, father of Sir E. J. Poynter, R.A. :

There is much being said just now about Keats the poet and some permanent memorial to be raised to him in the English Cemetery at Rome. This calls to mind that I went to his funeral there in 1821. The party consisted of his friend Severn who accompanied him to Italy and never left him to the last, Henry Parke, the Architect, the English Chaplain and myself (Ambrose Poynter, Architect).

We started before daylight, a necessary precaution on a Protestant demonstration, we four in one carriage and the COFFIN in another, and arrived just at daybreak at the foot of the Pyramid of Caius Cestius.

Copied by H. M. Poynter.  
(Oct. 24th, 1921.)

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